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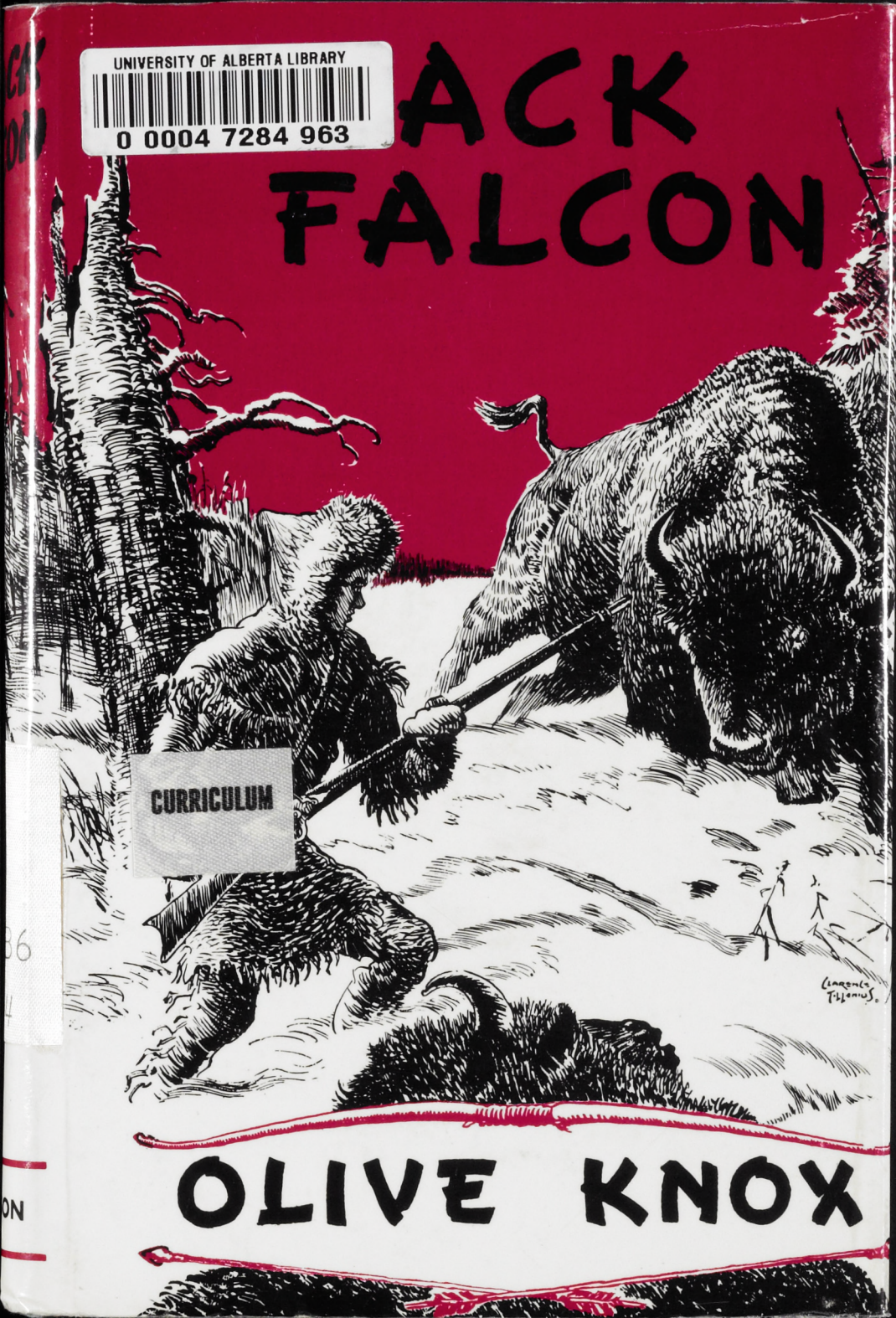


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ACK FALCON

CURRICULUM

OLIVE KNOX



BLACK FALCON

by

OLIVE KNOX

Illustrated by

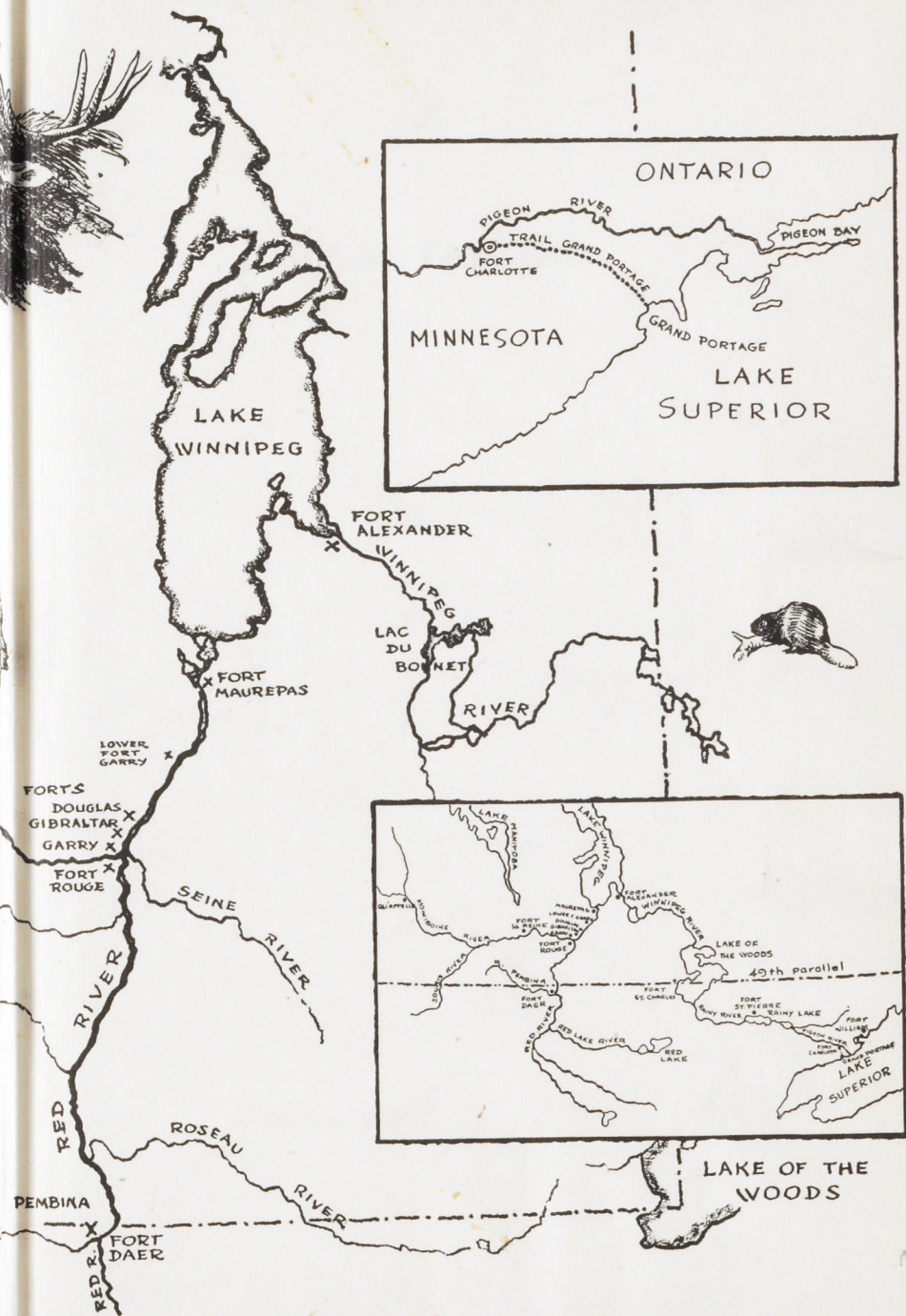
CLARENCE TILLENIUS

Many a boy has wished that he could run away and live with the Indians. In 1789, one boy had his wish realized—with different results from those he had expected.

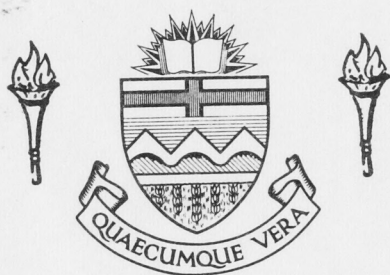
John Tanner, a lad of eight living on an Ohio farm, was kidnapped by the Indians. As Black Falcon, he became the son of a woman chief of the Ottawas. He was the first white boy to live on the prairies of Manitoba. And for over twenty years his life was filled with breath-taking adventures among the Indians.

Black Falcon is the story of the boy who later became a scout to Lord Selkirk's soldiers, helped them to retake Fort Douglas and make the colony safe for settlers.





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BLACK FALCON

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BY OLIVE KNOX



ILLUSTRATED BY CLARENCE TILLENIUS



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Dedicated with love to
Joy Eileen *and* James Corder Davis

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CREE
BRAVE



OJIBWAY



ASSINIBOINE

I. *Captured By the Shawnees*

John Tanner was kidnapped by the Shawnees in 1789. He was just eight years old, and up until then his greatest ambition had been to live with the Indians. Ten days after coming to a new home on the Ohio River, John got his wish.

"Stay indoors, John, and help your mother," his father said, taking his gun to go out with Ted and the Negroes to plant corn.

"But I want to gather walnuts today," protested John.

"Not today, Son," his father said. "The cattle are nervous this morning, and that's a sure sign that Indians are in the neighborhood."

"I'm not scared of any old Indian," boasted John, his gray eyes twinkling.

"That's enough, John. You do as I say and help your mother mind the baby."

"Minding a baby is a girl's job," objected John. "I'd rather plant corn."

"I'll have enough to guard without keeping an eye on you." Then, as John would have said more, his father added, "Not another word."

John bit his lower lip to keep from crying, and his father patted him on his dark brown hair.

"When you're big enough to carry a gun, you can help me," he said. "And now you can come and bar the gate after us."

John brightened and followed his father outside to where his brother Ted and three Negroes were waiting for him. Picking up their farm tools, they started for the high-picketed stockade that surrounded the farm buildings like a little fort. Mr. Tanner lifted the heavy bar and the gate swung in. For a moment John stood looking at the large trees in the meadow and the walnut thicket near the Ohio River. Already the sun was making the tree shadows crawl in toward the trunk. He sighed. It was a perfect day for picking walnuts and he had to help in the house.

"Bar the gate well," said his father, "and be here to open it when we come in to dinner."

"Some day I'll run away and live with the Indians," John muttered, putting the bar across the gate; then he stood and looked at it as he thought of all the adventures he could have as an Indian. His mother's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"John . . . John, where are you?"

"I'm coming." John kicked at a lump of dirt and walked to the house.

"Rock your baby brother for a bit," said his mother, "while I bake some corn bread."

John picked up the crying baby from the cradle and sat down on a low, wooden rocker.

"Don't rock so far back," warned his mother, "or you'll upset baby."

John brought the rocker to a sober swing and looked at his mother.

She was really his stepmother, and had married his father, who gave up his work as a minister and emigrated from Virginia after buying three boats. In the cabin of one John had become excited when he discovered bloodstains on the floor. It did not worry him that someone had been massacred there . . . it just made the trip more exciting. In another boat the horses and cattle were penned in by a railing. In the third, the Negroes took charge of the axes, plows, and scythes they would need on their farm. They descended the Ohio River until they came to abandoned buildings. And a few days later they began their spring planting there.

"Can't Lucy mind him now?" he asked.

His mother looked up from her baking. "No, she and Anne are preparing wool for spinning."

"Minding babies is a girl's work," John said grumpily.

"Not at all," said his mother. "Men do it too."

"I bet my Uncle Henry didn't," said John,

thinking of his uncle who had gone on Indian raids and had even brought back scalps.

"You don't know what your uncle did when he was a boy," said his mother mildly.

"Well, when I get big, I'm not going to mind babies. I—I'll go with my uncle . . . or maybe I'll run away and live with the Indians."

"You'd soon get tired of that," said his mother, smiling. "You'd have to do more work with the Indians than minding babies."

John rocked in silence for a few minutes. Then, looking at the patch of sunshine coming through the door, he had an idea. He took a quick look at his mother's back. If he could get rid of the baby, he could still get those walnuts. Suddenly he pinched the baby's hip. The baby puckered up his face. John gave him another pinch. The baby started to howl.

"What's the matter?" asked his mother, hurrying to his side.

"I—I think he's got a pain," said John. "Maybe he's hungry." He put the baby in his mother's arms.

As soon as she turned away he snatched his cap from the peg on the wall and slipped quietly out of the door. Running lightly, he reached the little gate. In a moment he was through it and racing across the meadow. He could see his father, gun in hand, keeping a watch out for Indians, while the Negroes and Ted planted the corn.

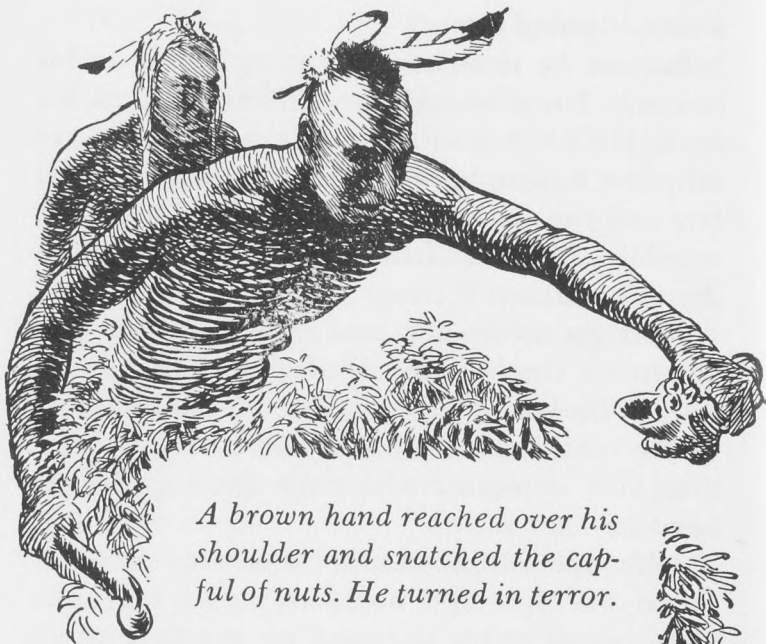
John dodged from tree to tree and kept out of his father's sight. Finally he reached the walnut thicket and began pushing aside the leaves to find nuts. His cap was almost full when he heard a sound behind him.

Indians, he thought, a fluttering feeling in his stomach. For a moment he didn't dare turn his head. He lifted his cap of walnuts. If there was only one Indian, he would throw the nuts in his face and run. He tried to rise but his knees were trembling. A brown hand reached over his shoulder and snatched the cap.

John got to his feet and turned to face two Shawnees. One was old with gray braids at the sides of his leathery cheeks. The other one was as young as his brother Ted, but his hair was cut in a topknot decorated with eagle feathers. In his hand he held a club.

John opened his mouth to scream. But his throat was tight and no sound came. His arms hung limply at his sides and he was shaking all over with fear. He turned to run and as he did so he saw the club rise. Then he felt a sharp pain in his head and fell to the ground.

When John came back to his senses his legs were tied. He was slung over the young Indian's shoulder as he dogtrotted through the trees. The jolting made John feel sick. He opened his eyes and a pain shot through his head. He wanted to cry out but something warned him to be still.



A brown hand reached over his shoulder and snatched the capful of nuts. He turned in terror.





Again he opened his eyes. He couldn't see any sign of the old Shawnee, but another young Indian, with a knife stuck in his belt, was running beside them and talking.

They hadn't killed him yet but maybe they were waiting to get him back to their camp to burn him at the stake or torture him to death. Perhaps he would have to run the gauntlet between two lines of braves while they struck him with their clubs. The thought was too much for him. He began to whimper.

The Indian dropped him to the ground. John swayed but a firm hand was kept on his arm. Then another Indian pulled out his knife and grabbed John by the hair, tilting up his face.

"Let me scalp him now, Weasel," he said.

"No, Black Snake," said Weasel sharply. "We must take him to my mother to take the place of her dead son."

John did not know what they were saying but he knew Black Snake was threatening to kill him and he could almost feel the sharp blade of the knife. If only he had a present to give them: the silver buckles his uncle had given him, his silver mug, anything. He saw the knife descending. It looked bigger and sharper than any he had ever seen. He shut his eyes and screamed.

Weasel grabbed the knife. "I said we had to take him back alive," he said crossly.

Black Snake fought to get back his knife and

Weasel gave a shrill whistle. John tried to crawl away. He would hide himself in the forest, untie his feet, and when it was dark he would find his way home. But hardly had he moved ten feet before five Indians rushed out of the bushes. John lay still. He heard Weasel talking to Manito, his father, who spoke sharply to Black Snake.

Then father and son untied his feet, grabbed his arms and led him through the woods. John dragged his feet along, numbly peering back in the hope of seeing white men to whom he could call for help. But the five Shawnees following them made threatening motions at him with their knives. John thought they must be planning to kill him soon.

Finally they came to a hickory-bark canoe, hidden in the willows. Throwing John into it, the seven Indians grabbed their paddles and with quick, short strokes paddled to the right branch of the Big-Miami.

Once again they stopped, hid the canoe, and pulled John ashore. He was sure that they were going to kill him now. But they had only stopped to eat the food they had hidden in a hollow tree.

"Eat," they said, handing him a piece of venison.

John thought of the corn bread his mother was making, and a lump rose in his throat so that he could not swallow a bite of the venison. He fought to keep from crying and showing his fear.

When they returned to the canoe he watched every bend and landmark. Perhaps when they slept he could slip away. But when they camped for the night, Manito made John crawl under his blanket.

"I'll wait until I know they're asleep," said John.

But the next thing he knew it was morning. The Indians hid their canoe and marched through the woods. And four days later they came to a large river. It was so deep that Manito put John on his shoulders. That night John cried. He knew that he would never be able to cross the river alone and get home. Towards morning his hopes rose again. Perhaps they would meet some white men who would rescue him.

The next day while they waited for Manito to return from scouting, John found a nest of eggs. He put them in the fire to roast. But no sooner had he placed them in the coals than Manito returned.

"White men coming down river," he said, kicking out the fire.

They grabbed John and hurried away. He screamed but they tied a cloth over his mouth. They met a band of Shawnee warriors and after much speechmaking sent them back to meet the white men. John was terrified, knowing by their signs, and their looks at him, what they were going to do. He feared that it might be his father

with a party of men looking for him, and the Shawnees would kill them.

That night they gave him some brown pigment to paint his face. He shoved it away. He had gray eyes and knew that he would never pass for an Indian. But Manito held him and rubbed the pigment on his face, slapping him when he tried to get away. After making another hickory-bark canoe, they paddled until they came to a large Shawnee village.

John trembled as the Indians rushed down to meet them. They pointed at him and asked questions. Suddenly a young squaw started to beat him.

"White men killed my brothers; I'll kill him," she cried.

"No," said Manito, putting John behind him. "I take him back to my wife."

Bleeding and sick at heart, John crawled into the bushes while the squaw argued with Manito for his life. But finally the old chief came to him, and by signs and a few English words told him that he would not be killed—not yet, anyway. John was glad when they went on.

Their next stop was a trading post. When John saw a white man coming toward them he shouted:

"Save me! Take me home!"

Manito grabbed him and held him even when the trader offered to buy him.

"No. I take him to my squaw," he said, refusing rum and blankets. "She will give me no peace if I go back without a son for her."

John wept, but the trader whispered, "Go with Manito. Soon we will come and rescue you."

"Please rescue me now," begged John.

"It wouldn't be safe," said the trader. "The Shawnees would take revenge on the whole fort. Perhaps hundreds of white people would die just because you were rescued. Would you like that?"

John tried to say he wouldn't, but it was very hard for an eight-year-old boy to be a martyr. But he didn't cry, and he even smiled when the trader said he would let his father know that he was still alive.

That night they traveled through the woods. At dawn, lights appeared on the river shore and they met a group of Shawnees on their way to Detroit. They joined the Shawnees and again John hoped that in Detroit he could escape. But before going to the fort, Manito made John crawl into a large hollow log. They locked him in with their camping equipment and a pile of logs.

In the morning Manito returned with horses, and for the next three days John took turns riding with Manito and with Weasel. Finally they came to Manito's lodge, where they were immediately surrounded by a chattering mob of men, women, and children. The children pulled at John's clothes, stuck curious fingers into his pock-

ets, and pulled his hair. They pinched him—and laughed when he screamed in terror. Then Otter, Manito's wife, pushed the children away, lifted John up in her fat arms and hugged him.

"Leave him alone," she commanded. "He is my son come back to me. You must not hurt him."

John tried to wriggle out of her arms, but she carried him into her tent and laid him on a blanket. Other squaws followed her and sat on the ground. John watched them as Otter chattered and tossed bits of bark on the fire. The smoke made his eyes smart and his mind spin dizzily. He wondered what the women would do if he tried to escape.

He got up and tiptoed toward the tent flap. Otter let out a shout and grabbed him. He returned to his blanket wishing that he was strong enough to pull the tent down around them and burn them all up. He leaned on his elbow and watched their faces veiled in smoke. A pine branch scraped against the tent, making John jump. Then he lay down and hid his face in his arms.

He must get away. But where could he go in this land of bush and water? Perhaps Otter would not like him and Manito would kill him, after all. His people wouldn't know if he were dead or alive. His eyes stung with tears as well as smoke, and he dug his fists into them.

Finally he heard Otter speaking to him and he swallowed a sob. He must not let the women see him cry. They would call him a baby. Or worse yet, Otter might hug him to her fat bosom again. He wished they would go away so that he could sleep. At last the visitors left and he fell into a troubled sleep, only to be aroused at daylight by a whoop that made his hair stand on end. It was Weasel wakening him to say he must come with Manito and Otter to be adopted into the Shawnee tribe.

Shaking with weariness and fear, he was dragged to the village graveyard. It was fenced in by little pickets. Friends who brought presents of sugar, wheat, and tobacco seated themselves on one side of the graveyard, while the relatives of Manito sat on the other side.

Suddenly his captors grabbed John by the arms and started to dance wildly about the grave of Manito's dead son. When John came within reach of the friends they handed him their gifts. Then the dance carried him toward the relatives and they snatched the gifts from his hands. This went on until John was ready to drop.

"Now you are my real son, Black Falcon," said Otter. "You will live in my lodge and have the rattlesnake for your totem."

John was too tired to answer her.

2. *Netnokwa*

The Shawnees stayed in their village until their grain was planted. Then they left in large canoes for the deer-hunting grounds. On their arrival they built a palisade of green branches and little trees around their camp. John was shown how to remove the leaves and the dry branches.

One day while working he got so thirsty and so hot that he fell asleep. Manito found him and struck him with his tomahawk. Then he went to his wife's tent.

"Old Woman, your white son is no good," he said. "He is lazy. He doesn't work. He just eats like a falcon. I killed him and threw him in the bushes."

Otter rushed out to look for John. She found him with an ugly cut in his head. She carried him back to the tent and dressed his wounds with herbs. For a few days John thought he was going to die and often cried for his home. But finally

he recovered and went back to work on the palisade, taking care not to fall asleep again.

That summer and autumn he paddled the canoe with the Indians when they went fishing. He also went with them on the hunt and was made to haul back the game. At night, his adopted relatives, who delighted in torturing him, would throw water on him as he slept. Many times he would have been killed if Otter had not fought to save him.

He was glad when Weasel and Manito went with the warriors to make war on other tribes. But he wasn't so happy when they returned.

"I killed your father and your whole family," boasted Weasel.

"I don't believe you," cried John.

Weasel gave him a push that sent him sprawling. "I did and I set fire to a boat too. One man was burned. The rest fell into the water and drowned." He laughed, and John wished he was big enough to knock him down. Then Weasel took a white cap from his camping things. "Do you know this cap?" he asked.

John recognized his brother's cap, and feared that his family might really be dead. While the Shawnees drank and danced far into the night to celebrate their victory, he ran into the woods and sobbed out his grief. For a year now he had been waiting for the white trader to rescue him and he had not come.

"Please come soon," he sobbed, "or I'll be dead too."

But the trader did not come, and that year John was sold to Netnokwa, a woman chief of the Ottawas.

"My baby son is dead," protested Otter, "and he was returned to me. I do not wish to lose him again."

But Manito wouldn't listen to her. "Netnokwa's son died too," he said. "I'll kill Falcon or sell him. Netnokwa will pay a great deal for a white son."

"No . . . no! Falcon is my son. I want him."

Still Manito would not listen, and when Netnokwa came to their camp with whiskey and presents of blankets and tobacco, John was sold to her.

Netnokwa had two sons and one daughter. Kewatin, who was eighteen years old and spent his time hunting with the men, paid little attention to John. But Red Thunder was just fourteen years old, and though he liked to tease his ten-year-old white brother, they had fun wrestling and playing games together.

John liked Netnokwa from the moment he saw her. Of an Ottawa tribe, she had smooth brown cheeks brightened by patches of ochre. Brass rings dangled from her pierced ears and beads hung down over her sleeveless dress. Around her waist was a beaded belt and on her legs, embroi-

dered leggings. Her hair shone like the wings of a crow, and was parted in the middle, braided and fastened at the back of her neck. Copper and brass bracelets jingled on her arms as she moved them.

John looked into her brown eyes and saw that they were soft and kind. He soon discovered that Big Hunter, her young husband, liked her better than his two younger wives.

"Why does everyone come to Netnokwa for advice?" John asked his new father.

"Because Netnokwa is wise," said Big Hunter.

John agreed that she was wise but he thought his Indian father, who was an Ojibway, was very wise too. Taller than any of the other braves, he was also better looking. The sun shone on his wide shoulders and muscled thighs, turning them to the color of the copper four-inch bands that he wore on his arms, and the large earrings that swung from his ears. In summer he wore only a breechcloth but in the winter he wore the gayly decorated skins that Netnokwa made for him.

His head was decorated too. All the hair but a tuft that grew out of the crown was plucked out. He had let this grow until it fell down almost to his neck and decorated it with beads and eagle feathers.

Big Hunter could run like a deer, and shoot big game with arrows as well as with a musket.

The first thing he did was to teach John how to

make a bow and arrow. Together they selected a hickory limb about five feet long. Then Big Hunter shaved it on the inside and a little on the big end. He strung it with deer sinews. The arrows were made of spruce with heads of sharpened stones. John searched for crow feathers and stripped them down from the top on the widest side. He watched Big Hunter fasten them securely to the arrow shaft.

"Now I will show you how to shoot with it," said Big Hunter. He took John into the woods until he saw a squirrel. "Don't make a sound," he warned, "and watch me."

Big Hunter put his left hand to the middle of the bowstring and pulled it back to his chin until the tip of the arrow rested on his left hand. Then he sighted along the bow as if he were shooting a gun. The arrow whizzed through the air.

"You got him!" shouted John, and rushed to pick up the red squirrel.

"Now you try," said Big Hunter.

John took the bow. He placed the arrow as the Indian had, then he pulled it towards his chin and aimed at a squirrel, peering at him from the branches. With a whirring sound the arrow shot away, and the squirrel ran to another branch.

"I missed him," wailed John.

"Your aim was too low," said Big Hunter. "Try again."

John tried again and again, until finally he hit a squirrel.

For the next few days he spent every spare minute either practicing with targets or real squirrels. He soon became almost as good a shot as Red Thunder. But Red Thunder had a gun and John wanted one too.

In the spring of 1794, Netnokwa and her family went to Mackinac. Nearing the fort, she hid John in the woods so that the white men would not see him. She returned with clothes, blankets, food, and a silver beaver brooch, because the beaver was her totem. And to John's delight, she had bought a new gun. It was a flintlock musket which could be fired from the shoulder.

"Why is it so long?" he asked.

Netnokwa chuckled. "That's what I asked the trader. He said it is long so that the powder will burn more. The more it burns the faster the bullet travels to its mark."

John stuck his finger into the half-inch bore and wished he could send a bullet out of it. As soon as they returned to their camp, he wanted to use it.

"I am twelve years old now," he said. "It is time I learn to become a hunter."

"You are a big boy for your age," said Netnokwa.

"Then you will let me shoot pigeons like the other boys?" he asked eagerly.

"Maybe." Netnokwa turned to her husband. "Let Falcon see if he can shoot with your pistol," she said.

Big Hunter handed him his pistol. "Go, my son," he said. "If you kill some game, I will teach you to use a gun."

John ran into the woods where he knew there were plenty of pigeons. Then loading the pistol with powder and shot, he held it close to his nose, and fired. The pistol jumped, struck John's nose and made it bleed. But John didn't even notice it. A pigeon was falling from the tree to the ground. Letting out a whoop of joy, he picked it up and ran back to camp.

"Netnokwa, look," he cried. "I killed a pigeon. Now can I have a real gun?"

Big Hunter laughed. "You'll need a gun to hunt bears, maybe," he said.

"And a powder horn all my own too," said John.

Big Hunter grinned. "A gun is no good without a powder horn. But now you let Netnokwa fix your nose."

John could hardly stand still while Netnokwa patched his wounds. Then he rushed back to Big Hunter. Impatiently he waited as the Indian showed him how to put in the powder, then the wadding rag, ramming it down with a hickory rod, and finally the shot and more rag. He was

a hunter now and that afternoon Red Thunder went hunting with him.

Now John's life became almost as he had imagined it would be before he was kidnapped by the Shawnees. If it had not been for thinking about his family, he could have been happy. But many a night he squirmed in his blanket, sick with loneliness. He began to think of the big loom that sat in his father's kitchen. He could see his sisters carding wool, their fair heads bent over their task while they laughed and talked, and rocked their baby brother's cradle with their feet. He could see his mother's strong white hand throwing the shuttle back and forth, weaving cloth to make him a pair of pants.

His vision was so real that he was sure they must still be alive and grieving over him. But remembering Ted's cap, which Weasel had shown him, images of his family being massacred would come before him, and he would tremble again.

3. *Trapping With Big Hunter*

When winter came and the snow covered the earth and lay in patches on the fir trees, John went trapping marten. At first the young Indians laughed at him. But Big Hunter took pity on him.

"My son," he said, "I will go and show you how to make deadfalls."

So they set out to where the marten tracks patterned the snow. Big Hunter helped John to cut down a number of saplings and shape them into stakes. He showed him how to drive them into the ground to form a small palisade in the shape of a half oval. Across the open front he put a log. Then inside the deadfall he put a small forked stick with a bit of dried squirrel meat fastened to it. On the other end of the stick he stood a short piece of wood to hold up another log, resting on the one placed across the entrance to the trap.

"See, my son," he said. "The marten will stick its head between the two logs to get at the meat."

"And when he backs up to pull it off the forked stick, it will knock down the stick holding up the heavy pole," said John.

"That's right. And his back will be broken. He will die at once."

"And without hurting his fur," said John.

All day Big Hunter helped John make dead-falls, and the next day there were marten in his traps.

The winter passed in trapping furs, and when summer came fishing was added to John's lessons. But at the fall of the leaves they returned to camp and found everyone sick with measles. Kewatin had been very ill.

The next spring Big Hunter decided to take his family to the Red River, where his Ojibway relatives hunted buffalo and traded furs with the Hudson's Bay Company, the North-West, and the X.Y. Company. It was over a thousand miles away and John felt a sick thumping of his heart. If they took him to the Red River, he would never get back to Ohio and his family.

"Weasel said he scalped your family," Netnokwa said, when he voiced his fears.

"Maybe he did not speak the truth," said John, dropping to the ground beside her.

Netnokwa shook her head. "You told me he brought back your brother's cap," she said, as she stitched at a pair of moccasins.

"Ted's cap," agreed John. "But perhaps my sister and my father are still alive."

"If Weasel said he killed them, he did," said Netnokwa. "He hates the whites."

John knew that was true; Weasel had often tried to kill him, in spite of Otter's protection. So now he lay on his stomach and hid his face in his arms.

"Aren't you happy with Netnokwa?" she asked softly.

"Yes . . . You and Big Hunter are good to me. But I don't want to go so far away."

Netnokwa remained silent for a long time. "Falcon would be very foolish to try to go back," she said finally. "The Shawnees would find you and kill you."

"Not if *you* took me back," said John, leaning on his elbow.

Netnokwa looked at him, her face very sober. "You are my son now," she said. "I bought you from Manito. You have new brothers and sisters. Forget the others."

Maybe his family was dead, decided John, but his Indian brothers and sisters could never make him forget them. The Indian girls were kind in their way. But they were not like his sisters. They played with him more like boys. They were not like laughing Anne with her freckled nose, or tiny Lucy with her golden curls. He lay there

longing to see them dressed in their Sunday clothes: dresses that swished as they walked and little poke bonnets that almost hid their faces.

But he decided not to say anything more to Netnokwa. The next few days he noticed that wherever he went Red Thunder followed him. So Netnokwa was afraid he might run away in spite of the Shawnees! He dreamed about it at night, but during the day he never found a chance to escape.

When they returned to Mackinac to trade before starting for the Red River, John made plans to tell the traders about his people. But Netnokwa would not take him to the fort. She said that Old Necklace, who hated the whites, would be there, and John must stay with Kewatin and hide in the cave.

John sat just inside the cave and whittled at a stick. Kewatin sat with his back to John, working on a bow and arrow. Outside there was only the sound of birds singing in the trees and squirrels chattering on the logs.

John looked at Kewatin's naked back. For a minute he wanted to raise his knife and throw it between his ribs. Then he could run to the fort and ask for protection. But he was held back by a vision of Netnokwa's face when she would see what he had done, and an even more terrible vision of what Big Hunter would look like. They had been kind to him in their way. He could

not bring them sorrow. And why should he kill Kewatin, who had never harmed him? His knife slipped to the ground and he looked down at it with horror.

When Kewatin turned and spoke to him, he jumped. But Kewatin said, "Come and sit beside me in the sun, Falcon." John closed his eyes for fear Kewatin would see what was in his mind. Then he obeyed, his knees trembling.

When the Indians returned from the fort their canoes were laden with trade goods. Netnokwa gave John a red and blue woven sash to tie around his hunting jacket, then told him that they would leave for the Red River in the morning. John found to his surprise that he was looking forward to the adventure. He looked affectionately at his family. They would take care of him and some day he would return. Shoving aside his doubts, he entered cheerfully into the task of getting ready for their departure.

Next morning, however, the wind had whipped the waves of Lake Huron into huge swells. It was impossible to set out with canoes. And while they waited for calm waters, the Indians opened a keg of rum and got drunk.

It was the first time that John had seen Big Hunter drunk. He was very gay and playful. He rushed up to Rotten Wood, who was walking ahead of him, and grabbed him by his jacket. Startled, Rotten Wood swung around and struck

out with his fist. It struck Big Hunter's jaw and knocked him down. Before he could rise, Rotten Wood picked up a stone and flung it, cutting Big Hunter's head open.

In an instant the camp was in an uproar. It looked as if there would be a massacre on the spot. Then Netnokwa ran to her husband's side and called Kewatin and Red Thunder to carry their father into her tent. When John would have helped she whispered in his ear:

"Run, Falcon. Run to the woods. If there is trouble, Old Necklace will blame it on you."

As soon as she saw John disappearing in the woods, she went to Rotten Wood's side and put her hand on his arm. "My friends," she said, "this young man is drunk. He did not plan to hurt my husband. Give him to me and if Big Hunter dies, then it will be time enough for revenge."

After a few minutes of deliberation, the Indians agreed that she was right. She took Rotten Wood to her tent and told him to sit at her door until she knew whether her husband was going to die. He obeyed, and all night he sat there with his head bowed, listening to the Indians dancing their scalping dance while the drums throbbed threateningly.

Inside the tent, Big Hunter's family sat silent watching him. Towards dawn he opened his eyes.

"You are better, my husband," said Netnokwa hopefully.

"No, my wisest of wives," he said. "I am going to die."

He tried to rise, but sank back on the blankets.

"Is—is my murderer still alive?" he asked.

"He sits at the door of your tent. He awaits news of you."

Big Hunter tried to get to his feet. "Since I am going to leave you," he said weakly, "Rotten Wood must go with me." He looked at his sons. "Bring my gun," he commanded.

Kewatin, who was still weak from the measles, put his gun in his father's trembling hands.

"A life for a life has always been our custom, my father," he said. "But this time it is not wise."

"Is it a son of mine who speaks thus?" asked his father.

"My father, if I could go with you to kill Rotten Wood, I would do so," said Kewatin.

"I still have strength to kill him," said Big Hunter.

"Yes, my father," agreed Kewatin, "but what will happen when you are gone? I, your oldest son, am not well. How can I protect my brothers, my mother, and your other wives against the revenge of Rotten Wood's relatives? I am dying too. Soon I will be with you. My brothers are young."

Big Hunter's breath came in gasps. "My son,

you speak with wisdom." He gave the gun to him. "Take it, my son."

For a few minutes there was silence in the tent as Big Hunter looked at them. "My white son," he said weakly. "Where is he?"

"I will bring him to you when the sun begins its day's journey," promised Netnokwa.

All night John lay trembling in a hollow log. He could hear the Indians making war medicine, and waited tensely for their war cries, which would announce that the scalping had begun. Towards dawn he crept out of his log and slipped through the cedars to see what had happened.

He peered around a tree at Netnokwa's tent, and saw Rotten Wood still seated before it. Netnokwa came out, spoke to the young man, then started for the trees.

"Falcon," she called softly.

John ran to her side. "Your father is dying," she said, taking his hand. "He wishes to see you."

When they entered the tent Big Hunter smiled at John and motioned him to sit beside his other sons. Then he began to speak.

"My children," he said, "I am going to leave you. I . . . I'm sorry to leave you so poor." He paused for breath. "I had thought to live to see you all big-game hunters. But that is not to be. You must learn to hunt big game and care for your mother and her family."

"Die in peace, my brave husband," said Net-

nokwa. "We will pray to the Great Spirit for you."

"Bury me with my face towards the west," said Big Hunter. "So that I can watch my spirit on its journey to the Land of the Sleeping Sun."

"Yes . . . yes," agreed Netnokwa. "And we will place at your side all your belongings."

Big Hunter shook his head. "I do not wish that," he said.

"But it is the custom of our people," protested Netnokwa.

"I do not wish it," said her husband. "I will take with me my bow and arrow . . . this jacket . . . and a pair of moccasins."

Those were his last words.

It was the first death of a friend that John had ever witnessed, and he grieved for his Indian father, as he had at the rumor of his own father's death.

The next day Big Hunter was buried in Indian fashion. John fought back the tears as he watched the men dig a circular hole in the ground. They lined it with bark and sat Big Hunter in it, facing the west, as he wished. Netnokwa put Big Hunter's bow and arrows and a new pair of beaded moccasins beside him, before they covered him with bark, then with logs and earth. A pole was stuck in the earth beside the grave.

John saw Netnokwa's eyes fill with tears as

Kewatin spoke to the mourners, telling them of Big Hunter's skill in war and in the hunt, and what a kind father, husband, and friend he had been. At each statement, Kewatin struck the post with his hatchet. When his speech was finished, John helped paint the pole, putting little figures of men on it to represent the prisoners Big Hunter had taken in battle; then figures without heads to represent the ones he had scalped. At last Big Hunter's totem was painted on the post and the ceremony was over.

But that night a feast to the dead was prepared. In the specially prepared lodge, John sat in the darkness, a wooden dish in his hand. He couldn't see Netnokwa but he knew she was sitting near him. Kewatin, now the head of the family, was acting as host. Moving about in the darkness, he put an ear of corn in each dish. Then, speaking in a low voice, he asked that his father's spirit be with him and his brothers and their friends in the chase.

The mourners ate the corn, being careful not to break the spikes that held the kernels and thus offend Big Hunter's spirit. When they had finished eating, Kewatin made another speech; then he lit a fire. In the flickering light, John watched the mourners light their pipes and smoke. When the smoking was over, the corncobs were placed in a hole and covered with earth.

Kewatin picked up the drum and played the

song for the dead. But John was so tired that he staggered to the side of the tent and curled up in a ball. He went to sleep hearing the Indians chanting:

“He-a-we-na-ne-we-do, ho,
 He-a-we-na-ne-we-do, ho,

 Ma-ni-do-we-a-ni, ni-ka-na,
 Ni-ka-na, ho, ho!”

John knew that the words meant: “He who is sleeping. The Spirit, I bring him a kinsman.”

A few days later they began their journey to the Red River. But Rotten Wood, who wanted to pay his debt by coming to hunt for them, was absent.

“It is not wise,” Netnokwa said to him. “At the Red River, there are many of my husband’s relatives. They are powerful and would seek revenge. Stay here or there will be more bloodshed.”

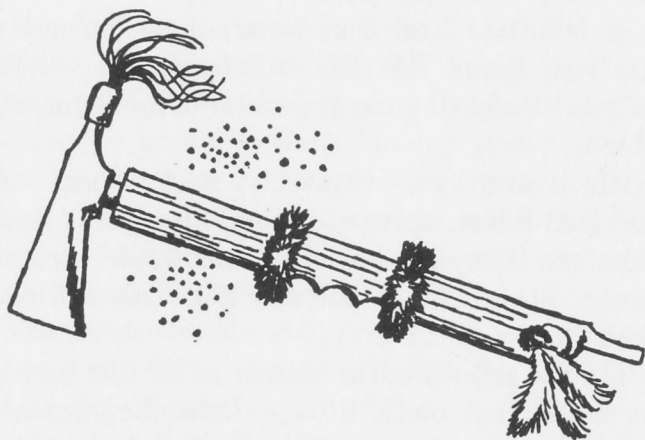
On the trip Kewatin became so ill that he had to be carried on a litter. When they reached Moose Portage he said, “My mother, I am going to die. I can go no farther.”

The Indians held a Council and decided that the main party would go ahead. But Netnokwa, John, and Red Thunder stayed behind with Kewatin.

Two months later Kewatin died. Netnokwa buried him, leaving one of her tents over his grave.

"My sons," she said to John and Red Thunder, "we must winter here. You will hunt for our food and trap animals to sell to the traders."

John felt suddenly very grown up. He was just thirteen years old, but Netnokwa was depending as much on him as she was on Red Thunder, who was seventeen. He could not think of leaving her now.



4. *A Miraculous Rescue*

John soon discovered that trapping even for food was not an easy life. One night, after visiting their traps, John and Red Thunder stopped to make camp. Clearing away the snow with their snowshoes, they set a fire of dry spruce boughs. John put a bit of gunpowder beneath a few shavings; then, using his flint and steel, he struck a spark. The gunpowder caught fire and flames curled up. Soon the spruce boughs were blazing, the flames turning the snow to pink drifts.

Skinning a rabbit, they put pieces of it on forked sticks to roast over the flames. They melted snow and made tea. When they had eaten they gathered more firewood. Then they lay down to sleep with their feet towards the fire, their guns at their sides, and their snowshoes sheltering their heads.

Soon the wind began to whistle through the forest; puffs of it made the flames dance. For a time only the mocking hou-hou of the barred owls broke the silence. The boys slept soundly, unaware of the sparks shooting from their fire to

the brush pile. Suddenly a spruce branch took fire. There was a crackling, snapping, and hissing as the branch wrapped itself from end to end in flame. Red tongues licked out at the camping equipment and spread to the blankets.

John squirmed in his sleep. He was dreaming that he was being burned at the stake by Shawnees who hooted like owls. He could feel the flames scorching his feet. He awakened with a scream and grabbed Red Thunder's shoulders.

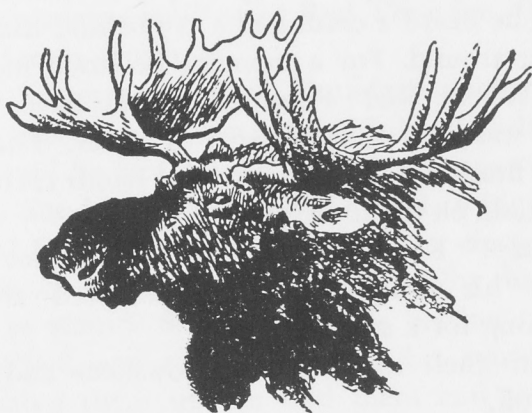
"Wake up, wake up!" he shouted. "We're on fire."

For the next few minutes they were so busy getting free of the blankets and putting out the fire that they did not have a chance to save either the furs or their camping equipment. When the fire was out they found that only their guns and snowshoes were undamaged.

"We'll freeze to death without blankets," said Red Thunder. "We might as well return to our lodge."

At dawn they tied their snowshoes around their ankles and set off on their homeward tramp. Only the sound of their snowshoes on the frozen snow broke the silence. John could not talk. The cold made his temples ache. He jumped every time the frozen trees cracked like exploding guns.

Once they surprised an elk sharpening his pronged antlers against a tree. But before they



The Great North American Moose

could get their guns raised in their numb hands, the elk had fled. Just after sunset they came to a river bank a few miles from their lodge. John lengthened his stride.

"Hurry, Red Thunder," he urged, "and we'll be home before midnight."

But they had picked a crossing where the current was so strong that the river had not quite frozen solid. John had just passed the center when he heard a crash and a cry behind him. He swung around. For a moment he stood motionless. Where Red Thunder should have been, there was only a dark patch of water. Then he saw a head bob up and mittened hands clutching for a hold on the icy edge.

"Help!" Red Thunder cried, as the ice gave under his touch and he floundered around searching for a stronger edge.

John knelt to untie his snowshoes and kick them off.

"Hurry," begged his brother. "Pull me out."

John dropped to his stomach and slid towards the hole, testing the ice as he went. Finally he was near enough to reach him. Red Thunder snatched at his hand and tried to scramble out. But halfway over the edge, the ice broke again, and he tumbled back into the water, almost pulling John with him. Again and again they tried, horror growing like an ache in John's stomach for fear that they would both be drowned.

Finally John pulled his hand away. It was no use. He looked at Red Thunder's frightened eyes and his purpling face. He couldn't last much longer. But what could he do? Netnokwa needed one of them to hunt for her. And he couldn't let himself be drowned, too, in a useless attempt to save Red Thunder's life. He started to back away from the hole, his wet mittens sticking to the ice at every move.

"Don't leave me!" cried Red Thunder. "Don't leave me to drown."

At the terror in Red Thunder's voice, John knew that he could not watch his brother drown, nor could he face Netnokwa with the news of his death. She had always been so good to him, and so had Red Thunder. He started to creep back to the hole. Again he stopped. Why had he been so stupid? Shutting out his brother's cries, he turned and crawled toward his snowshoes. Snatching them up, he tied them end to end. Then sliding back to the gaping hole where Red Thunder clung, tears freezing on his cheeks, he stood at a safe distance and shoved the snowshoes ahead of him.

"Grab them," he urged, "and I'll pull you out."

Red Thunder's face brightened. But he could hardly get his frozen mitts off the ice to grasp the snowshoes. And when he did, he couldn't get a firm grip.

"Take off your mittens," said John.

Red Thunder obeyed and dug his bare fingers into the crisscrossed leather. Inch by inch John pulled him out of the swirling black water. He had almost pulled him to safety when Red Thunder's snowshoes struck the edge of the ice like a wedge.

"Lift your feet," cried John.

But Red Thunder had no strength left to lift his freezing limbs. All he could do was to cling to the snowshoes. John looked at the shore. He saw a dead tree, its trunk frozen in the ice, its branches spreading towards him. He looked back at his brother; then, quickly untying his sash, he looped one end through Red Thunder's snowshoes and ran to the tree and tied the other end to the branch.

Praying that it would hold, he hurried back to his brother's side. He held his jacket with one hand and inched himself to the hole until he could get a grip on Red Thunder's leg. Slowly he raised it until the oval front of the snowshoe was above the water. Then he gently pulled the leg sideways until it was resting on the ice. He crept backwards, then to Red Thunder's other side, where he repeated the performance. Backing up to his own snowshoes, he lifted them and pulled Red Thunder away from the water. Safe on the bank, he tried to get his brother to stand. But

Red Thunder's moccasins and clothes were frozen and he couldn't rise.

He'll freeze, thought John, unless I can build a fire.

He left Red Thunder and searched in the underbrush for twigs and birch bark. Tearing the bark into shavings, he piled them together and spilled gunpowder underneath them. Not waiting to use his steel and flint, he took his loaded gun and fired into the powder. A flame shot up. Bit by bit, he piled on more wood. When it was blazing, he went back and pulled Red Thunder close to the heat. For hours the Indian boy shivered and shook, but finally he became warm and was able to continue the tramp home.

They found an Ojibway chief with Netnokwa. After hearing their story and praising John, the Ojibway said, "It is not well that you live with only two young boys to hunt food for you, Netnokwa."

"What else can I do?" asked Netnokwa.

"Bring your family to my lodge," said the chief. "I will help them in the hunt and there will be plenty to eat."

Netnokwa deliberated as they smoked their pipes, then she decided to accept his invitation to live in his lodge on Burnt Wood River.

When the summer days came, Netnokwa became restless. She wanted to continue her trip to

the Red River and make buffalo hunters out of John and Red Thunder. So, joining a convoy of canoes laden with furs, they started across Lake Superior to the Grand Portage. It was a dangerous lake, and Chief Wa-ge-mah-wuh stopped the canoes just out from the shore of Ile de Royale,

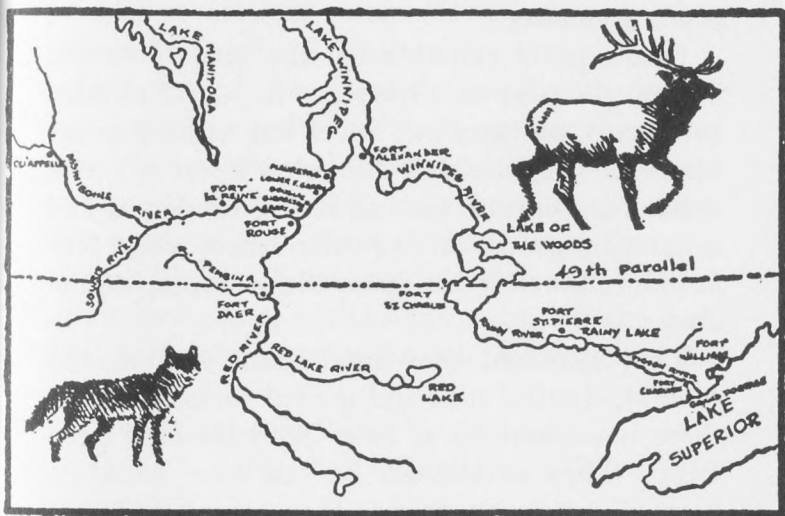


where they had been hunting, to send up a prayer to the Great Spirit.

"You have made this lake," he said, "and you have also made us, your children. You will be able to keep the water calm until we have crossed it safe and sound." After several minutes of prayer he cast tobacco into the water, and the other Indians followed his example. Then, singing a song, they paddled across the lake. At last

they rounded Pointe aux Chapeaux (Hat Point), and there below Sugarloaf Mountain was the Grand Portage,* a post built by the North-West Company in 1785.

Its stockades enclosed an area of almost four hundred square feet. One half of the space was



used for a workyard where the Indians were busy making birchbark canoes. The other half held sixteen buildings made of cedar and white spruce squared-logs, which had been split into boards with a whipsaw. The roofs were shingled with cedar and pine, and all the windows were of glass. On the lake corner a blockhouse looked

* Now rebuilt as a Minnesota Historical Site.

out over the water where a sentinel could watch for the arrival of the large Montreal freight canoes bringing trading goods to the post. Behind the "great hall" there was another blockhouse. It overlooked the Long Portage trail, along which the canoemen and traders from the northwest came, carrying furs to be exchanged for goods or money.

John's party stayed until the traders started back to the west with their goods. John had been over many portages but never one as long as the nine-mile trail that led through a forest of birch, balsam, and spruce. He and Red Thunder, as well as carrying goods, carried their canoe, while Netnokwa followed laden down with camping equipment.

They slithered over mud, sank into marshy ground, climbed hills and skirted rocks, and after three hours arrived at Fort Charlotte on Pigeon River. They sank down on the river bank exhausted but, soon rested, they put their canoe into the river, repacked it, and began the long journey to the Red River.

In the following weeks they crossed many portages—Partridge, Prairie, Carreboeuf, Outard, Elk, and many others—before they reached Rainy Lake, the Lake of the Woods and finally the Winnipeg River.

By the time they reached Fort Alexander, on the Winnipeg River, Netnokwa was weary and

sad. The trader there warned them that the lake would be dangerous, as the wind would be against them.

"We will manage," said Red Thunder, helping Netnokwa into the canoe, where she immediately went to sleep. "We're not afraid of winds."

When they reached the lake Red Thunder pointed at the still water. "The old trader is a woman," he said. "There are no waves."

John agreed. But soon the wind rose. Sweeping down from the north, it ruffled the water into ripples, then churned it into white-edged waves. Their birchbark canoe rose on the crests like a white gull, then pitched down into the troughs like a gull darting for minnows. John cast an anxious glance at the shore to his left and paddled furiously, even as he felt his fingers grow numb.

"We should turn back," he shouted.

"Can't," said Red Thunder. "We'd be swamped."

Their shouts awakened Netnokwa. She sat up and took one look at the waves. Then she grabbed a paddle, shouted directions, and began to chant a prayer to the Great Spirit. Slowly they drew near the shore. Netnokwa scanned its rocky edges for a landing spot.

"My sons," she said in a trembling voice, "this could be our death. Ahead are rocks that can tear our canoe to pieces."

"What can we do?" asked Red Thunder.

"Paddle, and pray to the Great Spirit to help us," urged Netnokwa.

John paddled and joined his voice to the others in their prayer for help. Then, as if in answer, an enormous wave lifted them high in the air. For a moment they rocked on its crest, then pitched forward. John shut his eyes. He felt a thump beneath them and looked around him in surprise. The wave had carried them over the rocks and landed them right side up on the sand.

"Quick, pull the canoe up higher," cried Netnokwa, tumbling out of it.

Jumping to do her bidding, the boys pulled on the canoe just as another wave rolled in over them. But the canoe was safe and John felt so happy that he could have turned somersaults.

"Light a fire," said Netnokwa, wasting no time over rejoicing. "We will have to dry everything before we can cook a meal or go to sleep."

For two days they camped on the shores of the peninsula, then the storm blew itself out, and they continued on to the mouth of the Red River. As they drew their canoe ashore in the moonlight, John saw a group of round lodges—an Ojibway camp.

In the morning John was awakened by voices. He got up and saw Netnokwa surrounded by

men, women, and children. From their friendly voices he knew that they must be Big Hunter's relatives. The men looked like Big Hunter too. Their hair was shaved or plucked, all save a bit at the crown which was decorated with bright ribbons, silver ornaments or feathers. They wore wampum beads of polished bones or teeth. In their ears were brass rings, and around the top of their arms, brass armlets. But more fascinating than anything else to John were the heavily beaded garters they wore around their legs.

The women were painted like the men and wore beads too. Their hair hung in braids or hung loose about their shoulders. And on their backs they carried babies laced up in wooden cradles.

After breakfasting together, the Ojibways struck camp and paddled up the Red River with them. Nine miles up, where Death River (Netley Creek) flowed into the Red, John noticed the remains of what looked like an old fort.

"Yes," said the Indians when he asked about it. "Old Fort Maurepas."

He listened as they told Netnokwa stories which their parents had told them about the fort that had been built in 1734 by the French explorers. Before the end of that August moon it had been occupied by La Vérendrye's son, Pierre, and his nephew, La Jemeraye.

Not far from it were other ruins which turned out to be a fort built by Frobisher in 1774, the first free English trader on the Red River.

Still going upstream, they portaged past the Sault a la Biche (St. Andrew's Rapids), and finally reached the Forks, where the Assiniboine River flowed into the Red. Here they found a number of Ojibways and Ottawas camped beside the ruins of Fort Rouge, built in 1738 by De Lamarque, who had accompanied La Vérendrye when he made his first voyage of discovery along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers.

When these Indians heard Netnokwa's story, they held a Council.

"Your relatives," said Long Bow, an Ojibway chief, "have come a long way." He pointed at John and Red Thunder. "Your sons are not old enough to provide for all your needs. And we cannot allow them to live in misery. What then, my friends, can we do?"

John wondered if they would be sent back. He looked at Netnokwa, but she was watching the face of the chief. One by one the other Indians got up to make speeches and finally they came to a decision.

"Your sons can hunt with us," they said, "and have a part of everything we kill."

Long Bow smiled. "Then we shall continue our journey," he said, and immediately the camp

broke up. The canoes were put into the Assiniboine and, paddling steadily upstream, they camped the first night in the buffalo country.

Red Thunder wakened John at dawn. "Get up, Falcon," he said. "Netnokwa says we can go hunting buffalo with the men."

John rolled out of his blanket, gulped down his breakfast, took his gun and joined the hunters, who led them through a bluff of poplars, maples, and willows to the prairie, spreading in dips and hollows as far as he could see. At first, John could see no sign of buffalo, then one of the hunters pointed, and John saw four black objects.

"Buffalo," said the hunter.

The boys started off, but the Indians stopped them. "We must approach them against the wind or they will catch our scent," he said.

Turning to the right and bending low, they ran at a dogtrot to the top of a knoll; the buffalo were right before them. "Bulls," said the hunter. "Not as good to eat as cows."

John stared at the immense animals. Their smooth brown backs glistened in the bright sun. Then an old bull turned to face him. He saw the darker brown mane fringing his neck and shoulders. The animal raised his head and sniffed, and the sun shone on the glossy black dewlap hanging from his chin.

"Stay here," said the hunters, "and watch us."

"Perhaps one will run this way and we can shoot him," said John hopefully.

Red Thunder shrugged and watched the hunters run down the hill. As the buffalo saw them they half-lowered their heads and began to paw at the ground. Abruptly the hunters fired. The buffalo turned to flee, but one of them fell after a few staggering steps. The hunters reloaded their muskets and fired again. They were too late and the bulls disappeared over a small hill.

The boys joined the hunters and watched them skin the fallen animal and cut up the flesh. Then helping to carry the flesh, they returned to camp.

"Some day you will hunt buffalo too," said the Indians, making light of the boys' disappointment.

That noon the delicious odor of fresh-cooked meat was wafted about the whole camp. John bit into a sizzling steak, holding it on a forked stick and cutting a piece off close to his mouth with his hunting knife. The red meat, traced with white fat, was the best he had eaten since he had come to live with the Indians. He thought he could eat it for hours, but to his surprise he found that a couple of steaks satisfied his hunger.

Six days later they came to Portage la Prairie and the ruins of Fort la Reine, which La Vérendrye had his men build in 1738. To the north was Lake Manitoba where they could hunt and fish;

far to the west was the Saskatchewan River and the land that La Vérendrye wanted to explore; and to the south was the Mandan country.

John raced up the bank of the river and looked at the plain stretching for sixty miles with not a rise in sight. The ground near the river was covered with debris from old Indian encampments. Broken buffalo bones, tufts of hair, and frames for drying buffalo to be pounded into pemmican were strewn around. He saw old moccasins, discarded clothes, round and tepee-shaped lodges. Here each spring the Indians came to fish for sturgeon, and here each year they brought their furs to trade for tobacco, white-men's clothes, axes, kettles, beads, and wines.

John and Red Thunder explored the open prairie while eagles and fish hawks soared overhead. They talked to the North-West trader, whom the Indians called Elm. Leaving the charred remains of the old fort, Elm took them to the lodges of the Assiniboinés. John noticed that the Assiniboinés were shorter than the Ojibway but well built and strong.

Elm pointed out their dishes made of wood, bark or horn and their cooking vessels of birch bark or woven roots of the spruce. "They hold water," said Elm, "and to make it boil, the Assiniboinés drop red-hot stones in it. That's why they are called Assiniboinés, though sometimes we call them Stoney Indians."

John noticed that though they braided their side hair, the top hair was cut short and decorated with bright ornaments similar to that of the Ojibway. Also like Red Thunder's tribe, the Assiniboines painted their faces and bodies, and what clothes they wore were embroidered with beads and porcupine quills. Their leggings that came up to meet their long jackets were especially gay.

They visited the tepee of Chief Little Assiniboine. It was made of sixteen large buffalo hides sewn together and spread around poles. Although it was the work of the women to set up the tent, the men decorated it with signs telling stories of their brave deeds.

They entered the tepee by lifting a flap that jingled with little bells, and seated themselves on buffalo skins scattered on the ground. From the poles hung dressed skins of beaver, marten, swans, and muskrats, as well as powder horns, shot pouches and a medicine bag.

By the light of the night fire, John and Red Thunder became acquainted with the Assiniboine children. They played the moccasin game, using red, white, and blue beads as stakes. Sitting in a circle, singing and swaying their bodies, they watched Otter, Little Assiniboine's son, place four moccasins before them. Then Otter dropped to his knees, a small stick in his hand. Chanting and swaying, he moved his hands in and out be-

tween the moccasins. John watched carefully. He was sure he knew which moccasin held the stick. He could hardly wait until Otter returned to his seat and motioned to him to find it.

John went to the moccasins. But already he had forgotten which one he had been so sure held the stick. He had only two chances to win, so he studied them from every angle. Then he touched the second moccasin from the right.

All the children hooted with laughter. "Guess right, Falcon, or you'll lose your beads," called Red Thunder.

John hesitated for a second, then he touched the moccasin to his left.

"You win," said Otter. "Next time maybe you lose." Then he gave John ten red beads. "Now it is your turn to hide the stick," he said.

The camp fire crackled, the owls hooted in the trees, and the wolves raised mournful howls, but the boys playing for beads did not hear them above their own singing and laughter. Time enough tomorrow to think of serious things.

5. *Netnokwa's Dream Bear*

As the leaves began to change color, Netnokwa and her family went with Long Bow, the Ojibway chief, and his family and relatives to hunt beaver. They left their canoe at Fort la Reine and marched across the dried grass of the prairie.

John ran ahead of the dogs of mixed breed and colors hitched to travois made from their tent poles. Against the vivid blue of the sky, ducks flew in silver triangles, and he could hear the honking of the geese following them. Robins, blackbirds, and warblers feasted on dried saskatoons and cranberries. Crows, hawks, and bald eagles hovered in the air, shrieking and cawing above the bleaching bones of buffalo that had been killed during the summer.

John felt the hair rising on the back of his neck when he glimpsed a gaunt gray wolf leaping away from one of the more recent carcasses, then stopping to watch them as they passed. But when he reached the stream where the barks of

poplars, elms, maples, birches, and oaks gleamed brightly in the Indian Summer sunlight, he forgot his fears of the wilderness in the excitement of trapping beavers.

Before they even set up their winter tepee, Long Bow took John and Red Thunder out and marked off a place where the other Indians were told not to hunt. Then he showed John how to set beaver traps.

John looked at the lodges half-concealed in the rushes, and at the small poplars that the beavers had gnawed down. He knew that the beavers built dams to make ponds in which they could make their lodges of sticks and mud. And now at last he was going to be able to trap them himself. He waited impatiently while Long Bow looked for the entrance to the beaver lodge.

"Ah, here it is," said Long Bow.

"Can I set my trap now?" John asked, letting out a sigh of relief.

"Wait. The water is more than two hands deep," said Long Bow, putting his thumbs together and stretching his fingers. "So first I will put a log in the water."

He jammed a short log into the base of the lodge, then he showed John how to set his trap. "Put it on the log," he said.

John had already tied a wooden buoy to his trap, and now he placed it on the submerged log. "Put your bait on a stick just above it," advised

Long Bow. "When the beaver comes back he will see the bait. He will put his feet down to find something to climb on. Then he will be caught in the trap."

"Won't he swim away and hide?" asked John.

"Ho, ho!" said Long Bow. "He will hide. But you will see the buoy. You grab it and pull him out of the water. Then you tap him on head and send him to Happy Hunting Ground."

The sun was sinking, sending shadows eastward, when they finished setting their traps. On the way home John asked about winter hunting.

"Time enough to learn that when the snow comes," said Long Bow. "Now you must build a winter tepee and catch beaver in traps."

Although John was kept busy setting and resetting his beaver traps, he found time to help Red Thunder and their new friends build their winter tepee.

At the first snowfall the tepee was finished. John lay on his back and looked at it. It was home and he had helped build it. Their new friends had given them buffalo hides to cover the poles and keep out the wind. And now that the snow had come they would pack it around the tent to add to its warmth.

The next day Long Bow took John muskrat hunting. Although there was snow on the ground, the river was still open. As they ap-

proached, they heard sudden splashes in the water.

"The muskrat have hidden," said John.

"Stand still and see what happens," said Long Bow.

John stood without moving a muscle, studying the ripples in the water. Suddenly a tip of a nose appeared, then another and another. A big muskrat stuck his head out of the water, peered carefully around, then swam boldly back to his lodge and pulled himself up with his tiny forefeet. With a shake he dried his reddish-brown coat. With that signal, other heads appeared—a big one and then two small ones. The muskrats went on with their building. The mother and babies picked up peeled roots and branches which they had dropped at the sound of approaching footsteps. They swam with them to the lodge and dropped them at the feet of the builder. He sat back, balanced on his tail, which John noticed was long and straight, not a short wide flap like that of his bigger cousin, the beaver. After studying the growing pile of sticks for a moment, the muskrat picked up one with his teeth and, without hesitating, put it down on a certain spot. With a flip he dived into the water, coming to the surface with his front paws full of mud and roots which he placed on the stick.

"They'll finish it in a few hours now," said Long Bow.

That night the wind blew from the north and touched the river with icy fingers. Two days later the ice was so thick that a man could walk on it.

"Come with me," said Long Bow to John, "and I'll show you how to winter-trap muskrats."

So John put on his snowshoes, tied his sash tightly about his leather jacket, slung an axe and traps over his shoulders, and with the hood of his capote snug on his head, set off with Long Bow. The wind stung their cheeks but did not reach their bodies. Their snowshoes left criss-cross patterns in the snow, which had drifted into rounded cushions on the rushes surrounding the muskrat lodges. Long Bow dropped to his knees beside a lodge and, using his axe, hacked at its frozen side.

"Always make the opening in the south-east wall," he said. "It is the weakest side."

"Won't the muskrats hear you and swim away?" asked John.

Long Bow grunted. "They'll come back," he said. Now he had a hole large enough to insert a trap. John peered into the domelike nest which was about thirty inches high and fifteen inches across with a shelf all around it. He could see icy particles shining on the walls and roof, but the nest was empty. He put his hand into the water.

"It is cold but not frozen," he said, "and there

are three holes going down to the water with little platforms between them."

Again Long Bow grunted and placed the trap on the floor of the muskrat lodge. "I place it so the muskrat will not bump it when he swims home," he said and, pulling the chain back through the hole, he rebuilt the side of the wall. "Hand me reeds, Falcon," he said. "See, I pack this tight so water won't freeze and keep muskrat locked out."

Then tying the chain to a rope made of reeds, he fastened it to a log so that the chain would not be lost. Before the afternoon was over, John was setting his own traps, and that night he could hardly sleep for wondering about them. Perhaps the ropes had broken. Perhaps the muskrats had pulled the chains away. It might even be that someone else would find his traps and take his animals. But no! Indians rarely stole one another's furs, and the friendly hunters had warned the others not to trespass on his and Red Thunder's hunting ground. Finally he fell asleep.

In the morning he could hardly wait to eat before setting off to look at his traps. In every one there was a muskrat. He pulled them from the lodge, tapped them quickly on the head, reset the trap, closed up the lodge and hurried home to skin his catch. He scraped off all the bits of flesh, then drew the skins over willow stretchers which Netnokwa had made.

"You will soon be a great hunter like your father," she said, and John knew she meant Big Hunter.

But John's education wasn't finished. Long Bow said that now his traps were in use for muskrats, he would show him how to catch beaver without traps. So they set out with sharpened stakes and when they came to a beaver lodge, Long Bow said, "First I break the ice. Then I drive stakes in to close the door."

"Why?" asked John.

Long Bow shrugged. "To keep beaver from running along his underground passage to storehouses on shore," he explained.

"They'll hear you chopping and run away before you can lock them in," said John.

"Maybe some will," agreed Long Bow. "So I put stakes in storehouse door too." He proceeded to do so, then returned to the lodge and cut a hole through the mass of sticks and mud. "Now watch me catch a big fellow," he said. He shoved in his mittened hand, pulled out a beaver, and tapped it on the head with his axe. He pulled out two more, then opened the storehouse and found that it was empty. "I guess the other babies built their own lodge this winter," he said.

Throwing the fat beaver on their toboggan, they went to the next lodge. This time John tried his luck. One of the beavers escaped into

the storehouse, but John caught him too—and barely missed having his fingers bitten off. But he soon learned how to grab them by the back of their necks.

“You learn fast,” said Long Bow. “Now you can hunt alone.”

And in this manner John began his beaver and muskrat hunting.

But as winter closed in with icy winds and blizzards, life was not all work in the winter camp. Two families of Crees joined them and set up their skin lodges. These were decorated on the outside with red and black figures they had seen in their dreams, as well as with picture records of their adventures in the hunt and at war. Inside there were other designs. Some of them represented stories that had been told to them by their parents or grandparents.

John was interested in the Crees. The men were tattooed with two blue lines going from their mouths to their ears and one down the center of their chins. They were dressed in skin jackets and leggings that reached to their hips. The leggings were fastened to the belts which held their breechcloths.

Their fur caps, which fastened under their chins, and their fur-lined mittens made John envious. And for extra warmth they carried buffalo robes which they flung about their shoulders like blankets.

When they took off their caps, John saw that the men wore their hair in various fashions. The old men parted their hair in the center and braided it in tails to hang down their backs. The young men had side braids but the hair on top was cut short and decorated with feathers, quills, or ermine tails.

The women braided their hair and rolled it in buns behind their ears. They covered the buns with a round, beaded piece of leather. John thought them very colorful, though it gave them the appearance of wearing horns.

After the Crees had been in their camp for a month, John and Red Thunder were invited to a meal. Their first course was dried buffalo meat, then to John's surprise they had a dessert of saskatoon berries. The Cree women had dried the berries and stored them in leather bags. And now, after being cooked in grease, they were puffy and juicy.

When the meal was finished they played the moccasin game with the Cree boys. John found that they played it somewhat differently from the Assiniboine boys. They placed their hands on every moccasin and won only if the stick or stone was in the last one touched. If it was in the first one touched they lost ten points and so on.

Finally tiring of the game, John began to ask

questions about the animal designs on the inside of the buffalo tepee. They replied by telling him stories which he realized were their religious stories. He already knew that the Indians believed in two governing spirits: the Great and the Small. The Great, they called Kitchee Manitou and believed that he had the power for good. On the other hand, the Small, or Matchee Manitou, had the power for all evil.

"But why do you pray to Kitchee Manitou by having animals speak for you?" John had asked Netnokwa.

"Because in our dreams we many times meet a certain animal," she said. "Maybe it is a bear, a beaver, or a fish or snake. Then we know that Kitchee Manitou wants us to use that animal spirit to carry our prayers to him."

The idea of animals, birds, sticks, and even stones having spirits confused John a bit, but Netnokwa explained that everything that cast a shadow had a spirit. John had also discovered that some of the Indians thought that when anyone died his spirit remained in the world helping his family and friends in the hunt. Others believed that the spirit went to a distant world in which it received its reward or punishment. If people had been good, they would go to a place where there was game with woods and running water. But if they had been bad, they would

wander up and down among the rocky or marshy lands and would be stung by mosquitoes and gnats as big as pigeons.

That night John tossed about in his blanket remembering the Bible stories his father had told him. He could remember his father preaching and singing hymns. Suddenly he was filled with grief wondering if he would ever hear his father's voice again. Then weariness overcame him and he sank into a troubled sleep, dreaming that he had run away from the Indians and started for Ohio, only to be captured by the Sioux, who were burning him at the stake, while the smoke rose up and stifled him. With a groan he awakened and opened his eyes to see Netnokwa building a fire in their lodge.

"Time to get up and go hunting," she said.

John was so delighted to find that he had been dreaming that he jumped up at once. "When are we going back to Fort la Reine?" he asked, as he ate his breakfast.

Netnokwa shrugged but her eyes looked troubled. "We have been eating nothing but beaver," she said. "We should go soon."

Two weeks later they decided that they would have to leave. The trapping was about finished and their dried buffalo meat had long since been eaten. The night before their departure John lay awake beside Red Thunder. His stomach was aching with emptiness. Netnokwa sat by the fire

singing and praying to the Great Spirit to send them food. Her voice rising and falling put John to sleep. But at daybreak they were awakened.

"Get up, my son," said Netnokwa. "Today we will eat bear."

"Who shot a bear?" asked John, rubbing his eyes.

"Last night I dreamed of a bear," said Netnokwa.

Red Thunder grunted and turned over to go to sleep again. "We can't eat dream bears," he said crossly. "They do not fill my stomach."

"My son," said Netnokwa, "last night I spoke with the Great Spirit in prayers and song. Then I slept. And he came to me and spoke. He said, 'Netnokwa, tomorrow you will have food. Near the path you follow there is a little meadow with a stream. By this stream there is a bear.' "

Red Thunder got up sulkily, but he refused to take his gun and do as his mother asked. He flung out of the tent and joined the Indians who were already packing up their furs.

"Netnokwa says we will eat a dream bear to-day," he said, laughing. "But I do not know who can kill dream bears."

Netnokwa called him back and scolded him. "I saw a bear," she insisted. "At the same instant I saw smoke rising."

Still Red Thunder refused to believe her. "Let Falcon go chasing dream bears," he said, winking

at John. "He can shoot them as well as I can."

"Maybe I will," said John, but he felt a shiver creep down his back. He had never met a bear.

Still scolding, Netnokwa broke up camp. Finally everyone was ready to leave. The toboggans were piled with skins. The dogs were hitched to them and amid hoarse shouts the winter camp was left behind. It was decided that the men and older children should go ahead. When they found a good camping spot for the night, they would leave the children on guard and hunt for food, while the women and smaller children caught up with them.

John swung along on his snowshoes thinking about Netnokwa's bear, fully expecting to be taken along on the hunt. But to his disappointment he was told to stay with the children and furs. He sat down on a pack, his gun across his knees, and clenched his jaws as he watched the hunters disappear behind a poplar bluff.

"I just wish I could shoot a bear," he muttered, "and that would show you I'm not a child."

Suddenly his face cleared. Why not look for Netnokwa's bear? He slid off his pack and slipped away without being noticed. There wasn't a sound but the cr-r-ring of his snowshoes as he hastened back along the path. Soon he met some of the women. Netnokwa was not with them but his Indian aunt stopped him.

"Where does Falcon think he is going with his

gun?" she asked. "Maybe to shoot Indians like his white relatives?"

John knew that she did not like him, not because he was white but because he was just one more mouth for her husband to help feed. But he was determined he would not let her know that he hoped to kill the dream bear. She would only laugh at him.

"No," he said shortly, and hurried on. Soon he came to a spot that was like the one in Netnokwa's dream: a little meadow, a winding snowy road bordered with small bushes that could be a snow-covered stream. The snow was light so he took off his snowshoes. Then he started towards the bushes, glancing from side to side in the hope of seeing a bear. Remembering that she had seen smoke too, he studied the sky above the bushes, but there was no sign of smoke. As he moved slowly forward the ground beneath him gave way abruptly. Since his gun had flown out of his hand, he crawled out of the hole and ran to pick it up. When he turned around he almost dropped the gun again.

The head of a brown bear was coming out of the hole he had fallen into. Trembling with excitement, John knew that this was his chance to show his brother, the other Indians, and his aunt that he was a real hunter. At the same time he could make Netnokwa happy. He raised his gun and aimed right between the bear's small eyes.

The bullet whistled through the air. A cloud of smoke rose up, and there was the bear, his head lying against the snow. John waited for a minute, then, as there was no movement, he walked slowly towards the big brown head.

"He's really dead," John said, and tried to pull the bear out of the hole. But the bear was too heavy. So, giving him an admiring glance, John ran to his snowshoes, slid into them and hurried back to camp. He saw that all the Indian women had arrived and set up the lodges.

"Have you killed the dream bear?" his aunt mocked. "Or are you running from it?"

Laughing to himself, John ran on without answering. He found Netnokwa talking to some of the squaws as she stirred a stew in her kettle. She looked up.

"I am cooking beaver for your supper, Falcon," she said. "Long Bow gave it to me since my sons would not hunt."

John tried not to smile. He wanted to tell her about his bear but he did not want her friends to hear. Netnokwa put some stew on a wooden dish.

"Go ahead and eat," she said. "There will be some left for your brother."

John swallowed the stew, hoping that the squaws would leave, but there was no sign that they intended to go. Finally he went to Netnok-

wa's side. "My mother," he whispered, "I have killed a bear."

For an instant Netnokwa seemed not to have heard and went on talking.

"I've killed a bear," John whispered again.

Netnokwa stopped in the middle of a sentence and grabbed John's arm. "What are you saying, my son?" she asked.

"I killed your dream bear," said John, wincing under her grip.

"You would not make fun of Netnokwa," she said, searching his face to see if he were telling the truth.

"No. I killed the bear right where you said it would be. It is quite dead. But I could not carry it home."

Netnokwa threw her arms around him and hugged him, all the time laughing and crying. "See! My white son has killed his first bear. He is but fourteen summers and he is a hunter. We must have a feast to celebrate his first big-game kill."

John squirmed out of her arms and Netnokwa rushed about giving orders. "Take some of the hunters and go with Falcon," she told Red Thunder. Then she told her friends to invite everyone to the feast.

But when the bear was brought into the camp, John was surprised to see Netnokwa drop to her

knees and take its big head into her arms. She stroked it and kissed it several times, begging a thousand pardons for taking away its life.

"Oh bear, relative, grandfather, blame us not. Do not punish my family," she said softly in its ear. "Truly it was not one of us, but a white boy who only lives with us."

Then as the bear's hide was stripped off, revealing fatty flesh underneath, she ordered the bear's head to be placed before her tepee. As the squaws cut the flesh into pieces and put them on spits over the camp fires, Netnokwa decorated the bear's head with arm bands, wrist bands, and wampum belts, and placed a dish of tobacco before his nose. Then she asked everyone to smoke. Giving John a pipe, she told him to blow smoke into the bear's nostrils.

John coughed and spluttered, but she insisted. "Falcon, my son," she said, "you must do as I ask, to beg forgiveness for killing our friend, the bear."

John tried again and as the air filled with the fragrance of cooking bear meat, Netnokwa began a sing-song plea.

"Cherish us no grudge, oh bear, because we killed you," she chanted, swaying and bowing to the bear's head. "You are very wise and know that my family and friends are hungry. They love you and wish to take you into their bodies. Is

it not glorious to be eaten by the children of chiefs?"

The smoke flowed in and out of the bear's nostrils and, although he made no audible answer, Netnokwa ended her plea by accepting his forgiveness.

John licked his lips as the breeze tossed the delicious odor of the roasting meat towards him. He had been a bit hurt at being blamed for the bear's death, but he forgot it in the feast given in his honor.

Tom-toms throbbed. Young and old danced around the camp fires and sang songs of praise to John, stopping again and again to let him tell how he had found Netnokwa's dream bear. Killing his first pigeon had been exciting, but nothing to killing his first bear.

"Boys can kill pigeons, but it takes a man to kill a bear," said the hunters.

"I'm a man now," John said to himself, "even if I am just fourteen years old."

6. *Fort La Reine*

At Fort la Reine the hunters traded in their furs to the North-West traders for tea, blankets, and ammunition. They stayed near the fort for a few days. Netnokwa and the other women gathered wild turnips, onions, mushrooms, and a root called rat's tail. And one day when Netnokwa had made a pot of pemmican stew, flavored it with onions and mushrooms, and thickened it with the turnip that had been dried and pounded to a powder, White Head, an Ojibway chief and a relative of Big Hunter's, came to dine.

White Head's hair was white, and all but the topknot had been plucked. He wore heavy brass earrings and arm bands. There was a scar on his right cheek that he had received while on a Sioux raid.

"Come to my lodge at Clear Lake, Netnokwa," he said, when she had told him her story. "You

and your women can make moccasins and jackets and cook for me and my hunters.”

“Will you teach my sons to hunt big game?” asked Netnokwa.

White Head agreed, and Netnokwa's family, now consisting of two of Big Hunter's young wives and their children, as well as John and Red Thunder, set out for Clear Lake. As soon as they were settled in their winter lodges, White Head set the boys to building a buffalo pound.

Using birch and poplar poles, they made a fence four feet high between the tree trunks. It was shaped like a funnel, with one end left open for the buffalo to enter. Then one morning a small herd of buffalo appeared in the meadow opposite the pound gate. White Head, followed by John and Red Thunder, set out to trap them, while the other hunters hid in the bushes. With buffalo hides over their heads, John and Red Thunder followed White Head right into the herd. They imitated the mooing of the cows and the barking of the calves. And all the time they kept moving the herd towards the pound. Curious, the buffalo began to follow them, and finally the small herd was inside the pound. Quickly White Head closed the gate, a signal for the other hunters to come out of the bushes and shoot their arrows, thus saving their gun ammunition for other game.

Frightened, the buffalo tried to break through

the fence, but the boys shook buffalo hides in their faces and uttered wild war whoops. Soon all the buffalo were dead.

For weeks the Indian lodges were filled with meat to be cured and skins to be made into blankets or clothing, or carefully scraped to make tent covering.

All winter the boys hunted with the older men and when the leaves began to bud they had many pelts ready to take to Fort Assiniboine.

"We will set out as soon as the Minnedosa River is free of ice," said Netnokwa.

"Then we must make moose-skin canoes," said White Head, giving John the job of stitching two hides together with sinew-thread taken from the back of the moose. When they were stitched he stretched them over a willow frame curved in the shape of a canoe. Bringing the edges well over the frame, he laced them with leather cords.

"Good canoes for downstream," said White Head, stroking the hair that was on the inside. John helped him make a second canoe. One of them they packed with their winter furs and the other was kept for John, Netnokwa, and White Head.

As they descended the Minnedosa River, John wasn't so sure that hide canoes were very good. At least once a day they had to be taken out of the river and dried over a fire to keep them from becoming waterlogged.

"When we get to the Post we will trade our furs and build a birchbark canoe," said White Head. "Then we can return to Mackinac for a visit."

But their plans were changed. They paddled past Brandon House, a stockaded group of buildings that had been built in 1793, on the north bank of the Assiniboine, just six miles above the mouth of the Souris River.

"Hudson's Bay Fort," said White Head.

Three miles farther on, they came to the Assiniboine fort, usually called, "Big John McDonnell's House." It too had been built in 1793, but by the North-West Company. When they reached the landing, John climbed the sloping bank with Netnokwa. Curiously he scanned the stockaded walls that enclosed the building like a huge square box. He noticed the wide gates and the sentinel lookouts on the bastion corners.

They found Big John in the trading house measuring out tea, sugar, tobacco, and ammunition to other trappers. While they waited their turn, John looked at the trade goods. He knew that it would take twenty beaver to buy a musket, ten beaver for a Stroud blanket, eight beaver for a white blanket, three for a one pound axe, one for a pint of gunpowder, one for ten bullets, and one for a foot of Spencer twist tobacco, which looked like a heavy rope. John hoped to get them all, as well as knives, beads, flints, steel, and awls,

before Netnokwa started to pay two beaver for every bottle of rum. But he had not figured on Netnokwa's thirst. When her turn came, Big John greeted her warmly.

"You bring me furs, good!" he said, shaking hands with her and glancing at John, who was guarding their packs.

"Yes, we bring furs," said Netnokwa.

"That's fine," said Big John. "We will trade. But first a drink." He poured rum into a birch-bark rogan and handed it to her.

John plucked at her arm and whispered, "Trade first, Netnokwa, then drink."

But Netnokwa pulled away. "Long time Netnokwa thirsty," she said. "A little drink will do no harm."

"Of course it won't," said Big John. "Friends drink first, then trade."

Netnokwa lifted the rogan to her lips, gulped down the drink, and passed it back for more.

"Take care, Netnokwa," whispered John. "Drink makes you forget."

But Netnokwa pushed him aside with a laugh. "You little Falcon, you go away. Netnokwa can take care of herself."

"That's right," said Big John, scowling at John. "You're old enough to look after yourself."

"But I helped to trap the furs," protested John.

"Yes . . . yes," said Netnokwa. "And you will

get a new gun." She picked up her drink. "Now you look at guns. Look at kettles and blankets too. Tomorrow we'll buy them."

John saw that it was no use arguing, so he left the Post. He found White Head and Red Thunder and told them what was happening. They hurried to the Post, but though John waited, they did not return. As it grew dark he heard singing and dancing, and knowing that it would go on until the furs were gone, John rolled up in his blanket and gloomily went to sleep.

It was noon before Netnokwa wakened and found John beside her. But there was no sign of her furs. Slowly it dawned upon her that something was wrong.

"The furs all gone?" she asked, pushing back her black hair from her face. John nodded. "No pots, no blankets, no gun, no beads?"

"Nothing," replied John.

Tears filled Netnokwa's eyes. "Netnokwa is a big fool like gray goose . . . or . . . old grouse," she said. "Netnokwa's head makes bad talk. Netnokwa listen. Netnokwa got drunk. Bah! Now we can't go to Mackinac."

John tried to comfort her. "Never mind, my mother," he said. "My old gun still shoots. We will get credit and go back to Clear Lake. There I will trap and hunt."

So John, just turning fifteen, became a big-

game hunter in earnest. He had many exciting adventures. One day he was out hunting elk. He had killed one and was carrying part of it home on his back when he saw another herd. He hid in the bushes and imitated the cry of the female elk with a birchbark horn held close to the ground. Immediately one of the males separated himself from the group and charged him. John jumped from the bushes and ran. Seeing him, the elk swung about and bounded away.

John glanced quickly around. He knew that the Indians would poke fun at him if they had seen him fleeing. So once again he hid and repeated the call. This time the elk advanced almost to his hiding place. He raised his head and sniffed the air. John fired and the elk staggered. John reloaded and fired again. The elk fell to the ground. John came out of hiding and started toward the elk to mark him as his kill, when he saw a grayish creature rambling toward him.

A grizzly bear! he thought, and started to reload his gun. Then he remembered White Head's advice. "Only shoot a grizzly if you have to, unless there is a tree near to climb," he had warned.

John looked about him. There wasn't a big tree within a quarter of a mile. He started to run. His breath was coming in gasps and his knees were trembling when he heard a laugh. He swung around, his gun raised, and saw Red Thunder trailing a gray blanket.

"Don't shoot," Red Thunder said. "I was just pretending to be a grizzly."

John's knees gave way and he sat down. "I might have killed you," he said.

Red Thunder laughed. "I saw you run from the elk," he said, "so I thought I'd give you another scare."

John didn't appreciate his brother's sense of humor, and when Red Thunder told about it around the camp fire, neither did Netnokwa.

"You crazy boy, Red Thunder," she said. "If Falcon had killed you, it would have been your fault."

Red Thunder grinned. "Falcon ran so fast he couldn't shoot straight," he said.

"Still he killed two elk and you returned empty-handed," snapped Netnokwa, which put an end to Red Thunder's teasing.

When the snow came, White Head and Red Thunder went off to chase buffalo. "I want to go too," said John.

"No, you must stay with the women," said White Head.

"But I'm a hunter too," said John, remembering the elk he had killed.

Still White Head refused, and sadly John watched them fill their powder horns and shot bags and set off.

"Never mind, my son," comforted Netnokwa.

"We need a hunter in camp too." She patted his arm.

But John was not comforted. He rolled up in his blanket, turned his face away from the fire and listened to their dogs baying answers to the yelping wolves. He was just as good a hunter as Red Thunder, he thought, so why should they treat him like a baby or an old man?

Netnokwa began her plaintive chanting and finally John slept. He knew that she was appealing to the Great Spirit to bring game to the camp and he had learned to have faith in her prayers. In the morning he was awakened by Netnokwa tugging at his shoulder.

"If you would hunt, my son, get up," she said.

John rolled out of his blanket and reached for his moccasins which Netnokwa had decorated with porcupine quills.

"Did you see big game in your dreams, Netnokwa?" he asked.

Netnokwa smiled as she stirred up the fire. "Yes, my son," she said. "Last night the Great Spirit came to me. 'You will eat buffalo today,' he said."

John grinned. "And the hunters won't be back, so that means I will shoot a buffalo," he said.

He hurried to eat his breakfast; then, putting on his moose-hide jacket with its fur-lined hood, he slung the strap of his gun over his shoulder

and left the lodge. He walked down to the edge of Clear Lake and looked across the snow-floored bay, pink in the morning sunrise. But no matter how he screwed up his eyes, he could not see any sign of buffalo.

Perhaps there'll be some around the bend, he thought, and ran down the bank and took a short cut across the bay. The sun dazzled the snow, turning its crystals into every color of the rainbow. But John was not even aware of its beauty, nor of the sound of his snowshoes as they sank in the crusty snow. He was planning what he would do if he found a buffalo, and was grinning to himself when he reached the point hemming in the bay. He stopped and scanned the shore again. Suddenly his heart gave a bound. Two black objects were moving out from the trees. He stood still, holding his breath. Buffalo! His breath escaped with a hiss. A bull and a cow!

Crouching as he ran, John started for the shelter of the trees, and dodged between the pines until he was within twenty yards of the animals. He stopped, watching them paw at the snow. Puffs of it blew up from their hoofs until the dry autumn grass came into view. Abruptly the bull ceased pawing, and John moved past a clump of birches, glad that the wind was blowing toward him. Quietly he approached the unsuspecting cow. Just as he was ready to fire, the cow turned her back. John hesitated, hoping that she would

face him again. Then growing impatient, he decided to leave the shelter of the trees and swing out on the lake until he could get a shot just back of the foreshoulders.

He was twenty yards from shore when the cow turned. He could feel himself tingling with excitement as he raised his gun. He must shoot to kill or she would charge him, and he wouldn't have a chance to reach the trees and safety. Forcing his trembling arm to stillness, he sighted along the barrel.

The gun went off and jerked against his shoulder. But he heard the spat that told him his bullet had struck flesh. The cow seemed to waver before his eyes and a red patch spread on the snow. John crouched, reloading his gun. The cow lowered her head and moved it from side to side searching for her enemy. Then too weak to attack, she turned toward the trees. John fired again and slowly the cow sank to the snow.

With a whoop, John rushed forward. He was bending over the body, when he was startled by an angry snort, and looked up to see the bull returning. His shaggy mane hung black and curly from his jaw to his knees. For a moment he stopped, raised his head and sniffed the air. Then, catching the scent of his mate's blood, he swept his lion-like head around to the spot where John stood. He stared for an instant, his large eyes



With horns lowered, he rushed headlong toward John.

flashing fire; then with horns lowered, he rushed headlong toward John.

John dropped behind the cow, leaned his gun against her back and fired into the huge mat of black, curling hair that covered the bull's head. The bullet struck and ricocheted off the animal's skull as if it had struck a rock. Staggering, the bull came on. Desperately John tried to reload, even though he knew he would never finish before the bull was upon him.

But the bull swerved and ran past the cow. In an instant John was on his feet. He saw the bull stop, breathing hard. If he could only reach the trees before another charge, John thought he would be safe. He debated whether to take the chance or risk another shot. This one might kill the bull, but then it might not, and he would be cut off from the trees and a way of escape.

As the bull began to turn, John came to a quick decision. Gun in hand, he dashed towards the trees. The bull caught a glimpse of a fleeing figure and, lowering his head, again charged. John could hear the hoofbeats and hoarse breathing behind him. But he dared not look around. He must reach a tree and climb it. Suddenly the hoofbeats stopped.

Hope sang in John's heart. Perhaps his first shot had taken effect. He risked a backward look and saw that the bull had only stopped to sniff at the cow. Puffing, John reached a tall spruce.

He kicked off his snowshoes, tossed them into a clump of small pines, slung his gun over his shoulder, and pulled himself up the trunk, arm over arm, until he reached a lower branch.

Taking a deep breath, he clung to the tree and looked down. His feet almost touched the back of the bull as he came to an abrupt stop beneath the tree. He raised his head and John saw his bloodshot eyes. Then, pawing the ground, the bull worried the tree with his head. It swayed with his weight and John took a firmer grasp and pulled himself up to the next branch. He saw the bull back away, paw the ground, then start to circle the spruce.

John balanced himself and reloaded his gun. He would have to try another shot or the bull would keep him up the tree until he froze to death. Moving cautiously, he locked his legs around the trunk, then ready, brought his gun to his shoulder and held himself in a cramped position until the bull backed up ready for another charge. He fired between the shaggy shoulders.

The jar of the gun made John lose his balance and he tumbled out of the tree to join his snowshoes in the clump of small pines. He disappeared beneath the snow-laden branches into a drift. For a moment he lay perfectly still. A blue jay screeched above him and he strained to hear any sounds of the wounded bull. He was sure he

could hear his heavy breathing and imagined the bull looking for him. Cautiously he sat up, his gun still in his hand, and tried to poke the snow out of its barrel, and reload. Then he got to his feet. Parting the pines, he peered between them.

Ten feet away the bull was standing with his feet spread wide apart, his shaggy head down, and his eyes looking directly at John. John's knees trembled so that he could hardly stand. Neither could he raise his gun. He just stared back. Then slowly the bull's hind legs went down. But only for a moment. He righted himself again.

John didn't remember raising his gun, but it was at his shoulder as the bull staggered a few steps forward. But he did not fire. He waited as much in fear that there might still be snow in the barrel as of the advancing bull. He could almost feel his hot breath upon his cheeks.

The bull stopped breathing loudly. Then a shudder went through his body and he dropped to his knees, rolled over and lay still.

Finally John came out of his trance and moved to the side of the buffalo. He cut out the bull's tongue as he had seen the hunters do, and, recovering his snowshoes, returned to the cow and repeated the performance. Then he hurried back to the lodge, harnessed the dogs to the toboggan, returned with the women to his kill and hauled the buffalo back to camp.

With their help he attacked the skinning and

cutting up. First he cut off the little hump, a three pound one above the neck, fastened to the big hump. Then he slit the hide down the back and removed it. He was careful not to waste anything, as the buffalo was not only food but clothing for the Indians.

The next day he helped the women and children build a cache to keep the meat out of reach of the wolves. Taking logs, they put them in the ground to form a circle. Then they piled snow over it and poured on water which formed sides so icy that wolves could not climb it to get the meat hung inside.

But for days the two buffalo supplied work in the lodge. The skins were stretched on stakes and the women took sharp-edged pieces of bone and scraped off all the flesh. From some of the skins even the hair was scraped, then dried for parchments or shaganappi lines. Netnokwa took other pieces, which had been well scraped, and worked them in the buffalo's brains to soften them so that she could make moccasins, leggings, and a new jacket for John.

John said he wanted his jacket smoked so that it would be a rich yellowish-brown, so she hung the pieces over the fire to smoke them.

Making a bridle rein out of the long buffalo hair for the day when he would have a horse, John marveled anew at the many uses for the animal. Netnokwa even used the stomachs and

bladders for vessels, and the horns for drinking cups, spoons, or powder horns.

As they feasted on the buffalo flesh, so rich in red juice and fine streaked fat, John was praised. But he lay awake long after the others slept. He could hear the wolves yelping and knew they were picking the buffalo bones. Somehow he felt sorry, for the bull had been killed seeking his revenge. And John wished he could tell Net-nokwa of his thoughts, but he knew she would say, "Yes, my son, but it is only by the chase that we too can live."

7. *Man of the Family*

As usual in April, Netnokwa began to get restless. She wanted to go back to Mackinac to visit her people, the Ottawas, for the summer months.

"Then we will take our furs overland to Brandon House," said White Head. "After the sugaring, we will visit your relatives."

With their furs piled on sleds, some of them pulled by their dogs, others by the young men, they set out on the seventy-five-mile tramp. They arrived at Brandon House in a week and traded in their furs. Then they went down the Assiniboine to Pine Creek. There among the old stockades and bastions of Pine Fort, which the North-West Company had abandoned in 1794, they set up a temporary camp. Behind them were hills fringed with pointed spruce and silver birches, and near by were the yellow dunes of Devil's Hills. They were bare of snow, though the rest of the land still had patches of it.

John saw the Indians glance nervously at the hills. He knew they were superstitious about

them. And no wonder. Strange noises had been heard coming from within, and ghosts walked there at night.

"The spirits keep the sand moving so nothing will grow on them," Netnokwa had told him, and now John saw her cast a hasty glance over her shoulder as she threw tobacco into the fire before they began their evening meal. If it had not been for the abundance of birch bark, spruce gum, and juniper and spruce rootlets used in building canoes, the Indians would never have ventured near the place.

"After we make rogans for sugaring, then we will go to the sugar trees," said Netnokwa.

White Head agreed with a nod. "But we will need a new canoe to go on a long journey," he said, puffing at his pipe.

The next week was spent in making rogans to catch the sugar sap and a large birchbark trough, shaped like a canoe, to hold the extra sap, while the rest boiled down into sugar.

But other things were made of birch bark too. John put inner soles into his moccasins to keep his feet from getting wet in the snow that was quickly melting. He shredded bits of the outer bark for his tinder box as nothing else caught fire so quickly from sparks struck with his flint and steel. They even ate shredded pieces of the inner bark, and one day Netnokwa cooked some

of it with pemmican. John thought it tasted like a vegetable and gave a nice tang to the meat.

But of even greater interest to John was the moose-call trumpet that White Head made.

"You put the trumpet close to the ground and blow so it makes a noise like a moose cow," said White Head. "Then the bull moose will come running."

"Like the elk did when I blew on Red Thunder's trumpet," said John, and the Ojibway agreed.

Then the sap began to run in a spell of warm weather and Netnokwa said it was time to move their camp to the sugar trees by the Assiniboine River. Crows were flapping their wings in the still-leafless trees, and ducks, swans, and geese were returning from the south. In the western maple the redheaded woodpeckers also discovered that it was sugaring time by tapping at the trees with their strong beaks.

The day of the party's arrival was warm and bright. As the women set up their lodges, White Head and the other men tapped the trees with their axes, inserted birchbark spouts and set birchbark rogans beneath them.

"It will freeze tonight," said White Head, "and that is good."

For two weeks they sugared and there was great excitement in their camp. The children

liked sugaring time best of all. They would run into the bush for some snow and bring it to Netnokwa. When she poured some of the boiled syrup on the snow it would harden into the only candy they ever had.

Even John hated to leave the sugaring to go with White Head to build a canoe. Back at Pine Creek they carefully removed large pieces of birch from the trees. On the outside the bark was white, streaked with black, but as smooth to the touch as the fur of a muskrat. Inside it was firm and tinged with the pinky-orange of a prairie sunset.

After the inside was rubbed over with a mixture of boiled spruce gum and bear grease, White Head prepared the timbers for the framework. He made splints from the cedars to form the slender frame, then cedar bars for the seats, which he inserted into the gunwales of the same wood which was attached to the rim.

Digging up the small roots of the juniper and spruce for binding the edges and seams, John startled a rabbit whose white winter coat was already patched with brown. And when the seams were finished he was anxious to try out the canoe.

"Is it ready yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," said White Head, and proceeded to wash the canoe with hot water. "This takes out the bulges," he explained.

When it was dry White Head showed John how to cover the outside seams with more of the boiled gum and bear grease.

"No water will come in now," he said, when they had finished.

"Can I take it out on the river now?" asked John, reaching for the paddles.

The chief shook his head. There was still the painting of pictures to be done. With ochre and vermilion, with root stains and porcupine quills, he set about decorating the bark. There were pictures of elk, buffalo, moose—all reminders of past adventures. Then White Head added Netnokwa's beaver totem, his own bear totem, and John's rattlesnake totem.

"Now everyone will know that this canoe belongs to us," he said.

Finally it was all finished and John put it in the Assiniboine River. It cut through the water like a shooting arrow and John felt like singing. He had helped make this canoe that would be their home for the rest of the summer.

The next day they loaded up their camping goods and paddled to Portage la Prairie where Netnokwa had gone after sugaring. While they were there a band of Indians came in.

"We're going to visit the Mandan country, White Head," they said. "Come with us."

White Head looked toward the south and his

eyes grew bright, but Netnokwa spoke before he could answer. "No. White Head is coming with me to Mackinac," she said.

"Next year you can go to Mackinac," said the Indians.

"No! I'll go this summer before the fall of the leaves," insisted Netnokwa, and turned to White Head. But it was easy to see that the chief wanted to go with his friends.

"You and Falcon start ahead," he said. "Red Thunder and I will join you before the fall of the leaves."

"Falcon is just a boy," said Netnokwa. "How can he feed three women and three children?"

"Falcon is big for his years," said White Head. "He is a good hunter too; he will take care of you. But beware of the Sioux who sometime lay in wait at the Forks."

"How can I tell if there are Sioux at the Forks?" asked John, dreading the trip alone with the women, but not wanting to show his fear.

"Listen for the owl's cry," said White Head. "It's their signal. If you hear it, hide or paddle hard."

Netnokwa could not persuade White Head to change his mind, so they parted. Nearing the mouth of the Assiniboine, called the Forks, John listened intently before paddling in to the Red River. It was midnight and there were stars but

no moon. He decided that all was safe and dipped his paddle.

"Hou-hou!" The call came just as the canoe drifted into the current of the Red River.

"Hou-hou!"

The lilting, mocking cry came across the water again. John's fingers went rigid on his paddle and he heard Netnokwa, paddling in the stern, draw in her breath with a hiss. He was glad that the other women and children were asleep in the middle of the canoe.

"Hou-hou!"

Now it was from the left side of the Red and John felt a prickling at the back of his neck. He knew that if the Sioux caught them, they would be scalped.

"Hou-hou!" The cry came from the right bank.

"Sioux," whispered Netnokwa.

John's eyes narrowed as he peered at the tree-lined shore. All was still, but he grasped his paddle and kept the canoe in the middle of the river. Suddenly he stiffened. A large dark object loomed up ahead of him. He drew in his breath. Could it be the Sioux, swimming out to grab their canoe? He tightened his lip, and reached back for his fishing spear. He held it raised, ready to throw, when, with a flutter, a head rose from the water.

"A goose!" said John, and his voice shot up

as the bird rose, its wings almost touching him as it swept by.

"Sh . . ." warned Netnokwa. "We're still in danger."

Bending low, John dipped his paddle silently, stopping only when they were far from the Forks and the hou-houing of owls or Sioux.

"Must have been real owls," said John, as he pulled the canoe up the bank and hid it among the willows.

"Real ones, maybe," said Netnokwa. "Maybe Sioux. It is better not to know."

She patted his head and John knew that she meant they still had their scalps. But the next day he knew she had really been frightened. She refused to continue their journey until the North-West trader, from Pembina, caught up with them.

They followed the trader to Fort Alexander on the Winnipeg River, and while waiting for White Head and Red Thunder, John fished in Lake Winnipeg. He caught bass, pickerel, white-fish and gold-eyes. Then as the last mellowing days of August ripened the wild rice kernels, John and Netnokwa went rice harvesting.

Paddling their canoe into a meadow of rice, they gently bent the six-foot stalks over the canoe, and with a stick tapped the heads. The grain fell into the canoe like a shower of rain. When they

had all they could carry, they went ashore and spread the rice on large, flat stones, so the women could keep turning it in the sun. When it was nearly dry they made a platform of small poles placed on four stakes hammered into the ground. On the platform they put a mat woven out of cedar bark, and spread the rice over it.

"Keep the fire low," warned Netnokwa, as John put a bed of hot coals beneath the platform. "And don't forget to stir the rice."

While the rice was curing so that the husks would blow off with the wind, Netnokwa prepared some green rice for immediate use. She put rice in her iron kettle and hung it over the fire, stirring it constantly. When the kernels began to swell and the husks to loosen, she placed the rice into a skin bag and put it into a hole in the ground that John had dug. Jumping up and down on the bag with their feet, the children prepared the rice for winnowing. Then the women tossed it up and down on shallow birch-bark dishes so that the wind could blow away the husks.

Netnokwa cooked the rice in various ways. She made soup by adding fat and fish or rabbit. She cooked it as a vegetable and served it with the meat of deer, duck, or geese. She even served it as a dessert with maple sugar, wild raspberries or blueberries. And John could never decide how he liked it best.

Then when the leaves began to flutter down from the trees and White Head and Red Thunder had not arrived, Netnokwa decided to return to the Assiniboine River. They traded in their furs and most of their rice, and began the return journey.

Two days paddling above Fort la Reine, they found a message written on a piece of birch bark. From the pictures of bears and other animals, Netnokwa recognized the totems of White Head and his friends.

"The message says they have returned to their lodge at Clear Lake," she said.

"We will follow them," said John.

8. *Cut Nose Joins the Band*

The next two years passed swiftly for John. He rose at dawn when the sky was as delicately tinted as the crocus, primrose, moccasin flower, wild rose, and marsh irises. And when the sun set in the vivid colors of the tiger lily, the Indian paintbrush, fireweed, wood violets, and purple vetches, John would often be miles away from his lodge. Before he arrived, stars would hang in the sky so close that he felt he could spring up and touch them. On some nights the northern lights would shimmer against the sky in a gigantic, luminous rainbow scarf.

John, now wearing his hair in two braids, never grew tired of the beauty of the country, nor of the wide spaces where beyond in a hollow, or just around a bluff, he might meet a new adventure.

He learned to tell the animals by their tracks as well as the Indians could. And once when they were very hungry, the young men went rabbit shooting. John shot a large number and Net-

netnokwa saved the skins. She cut them into long strips and wove them into a cloth the shape of a robe. John found it soft and warm under his blanket.

Then White Head taught him to track down moose, walking noiselessly so that the animal would not hear him. He also learned to fish with a spear and with nets made of willow bark. If they were fishing for sturgeon in the deep part of the river, they strung the nets between two canoes and patrolled up and down the river. Once caught, the sturgeon was easy to haul ashore. Some of the Indians ate the sturgeon raw, but John liked it better when Netnokwa boiled or roasted it, or smoked it on racks for future use.

White Head taught him how to find bears in hollow trees and in dens built beneath the roots of trees. Towards spring, Netnokwa wanted bear grease, so John went hunting. He watched for trees that had fresh claw marks on them. At last he found one. He rubbed the bark of the tree with a stick and made a noise like a crying cub. Then he put his ear against the tree and listened. He heard a faint rustling inside. Again he tapped the tree and gave the cub cry. Still the bear did not appear.

"I'll have to smoke you out," said John.

He tied dried branches to the end of a pole and set it on fire. Then he climbed the tree and pushed the burning end inside the hole, shaking

it until the branches fell off. Immediately there was a scuffling sound followed by a growling and a snuffing. A brown head appeared at the hole, and with a yelp, the bear backed down the tree.

John fired and the bear fell to the ground. When he was sure the bear was dead, he dragged it back to camp and Netnokwa fried out the bear fat, pouring it into buffalo bags for future use.

Just about this time a new Indian boy joined Chief White Head's band. He was two years older than John, who was just past sixteen, and he said his father had been killed in a raid against the Sioux. Taller than John, he had dusky brown skin. He had shaved his head, leaving only a lock at the crown which he decorated with bits of brass and dyed bird feathers. He wore brass earrings and brass armlets. John thought he would have been handsome but for a scar on his nose, which he boasted he had received in battle. But the scar caused the Indians to call him Cut Nose.

John did not know whether he liked Cut Nose or not. He admired the muscles that rippled across his back and along his arms. He knew Cut Nose must be strong. But he didn't like his mocking grin or the mean look in his eyes when he called him "Pale Face." And then he was always challenging John to games to show off his strength.

The night before they were to paddle down the Minnedosa River to the Big Bend, where they

planned to leave their canoes and walk to the Assiniboine fort, Cut Nose challenged John to play Wheel and Arrow, a game to test the quickness of the eye and hand.

John accepted and found a ten-inch board about six feet long which he staked on its edge into the ground, while Cut Nose staked another one twelve feet south of John's. Then as the women, children, and men formed a circle around them, shouting and betting on who would win, they began the game.

For the first round, John held an arrow in his left hand, and a wheel-like piece of wood that had a red mark at the center in his right. Cut Nose held only an arrow. Standing before the north end board, they waited for White Head to give the starting signal.

"Pale Face will overshoot," mocked Cut Nose.

John shrugged and Cut Nose laughed. Then White Head shouted, "Go!"

The boys sprang forward. John rolled the wheel straight for the goal board, changed his arrow to his right hand, raised his arm, and the instant the wheel struck threw his arrow, aiming so that it would strike the board as near where the wheel would land as possible.

"Whang!"

It looked as if both arrows had struck the goal at the same instant. A shout went up from the spectators as the boys ran forward to measure the

distance between the arrow points and the red mark on the wheel, which now lay flat on the ground.

"They're the same distance from the mark," said John, studying the arrows that had hit the board at a different angle, but were still an equal distance from the mark on the wheel.

Cut Nose scowled. "Next time they'll be different," he said, and picked up the wheel. John waited; as the wheel left Cut Nose's hand, he sprinted forward, watching the wheel's course and judging where it would hit the goal. Allowing for the bounce, he threw his arrow. And this time he won.

For almost an hour they played, while White Head kept the score by placing small sticks beside a bigger one painted with the boys' totem signs. By now John was hot and tired. His legs were trembling. It was his last time to throw the wheel, change his arrow to his right hand and try to tie Cut Nose, who was one point ahead. He sent the wheel spinning along the ground and had his arrow ready. Just as he started to fling it, Cut Nose lurched against him as he ran past. The contact had been so swift that no one else had seen it, but it sent John's arrow off its course, and Cut Nose won the game.

"Too bad, Falcon," comforted Netnokwa. "You played well."

Her words were kind but John saw disappoint-

ment in her eyes, and he knew now that he did not like Cut Nose. How could he like anyone who would play unfairly to win a game?

But Cut Nose wasn't content with winning. As they paddled their fur-laden canoes down the Minnedosa River, he kept teasing John. John tried not to answer back but he wished he could do something to show up Cut Nose. And the very next night he saw a good chance. When they came to the Big Bend, where they always hid their canoe, and took the short cut across land to the Assiniboine River, the sun was within an hour of setting.

"Why don't we camp here tonight?" asked John.

"You know no one ever camps here," said Netnokwa, looking over her shoulder.

"Why not?" asked John.

"Sh . . ." said Netnokwa, and looked at the Indians getting their packs ready for the portage. "It's the spot of the two dead men."

"But I don't understand," persisted John.

"Many years ago," said Netnokwa, half whispering, "two brothers quarreled right here. They drew their knives and killed each other. Since then, no Indian will sleep on the spot of the two dead men. White Head told me so."

John felt a shiver go down his back but he wanted to hear more. "I wouldn't mind sleeping here," he said.

"No, you do not understand, Falcon," Netnokwa's face had paled. "Every night the brothers come out of their graves and fight their battle all over again. If they find anyone here . . . they might kill him. You must not sleep here."

John was about to agree with her when he looked up and saw Cut Nose grinning. He knew the Indian lad had heard Netnokwa and an idea came to him. He shook off his fear and laughed.

"I do not believe that the dead come back," he said. "So I am not afraid of ghosts. Are you, Cut Nose?"

"I'm not afraid of anything," boasted Cut Nose.

"Good," said John. "Then you will stay with me tonight. We will sleep here and wait for the ghosts."

"Why should I?" said Cut Nose.

"Because I ask you," said John, grinning, then he shrugged. "But perhaps you are afraid and would let me stay alone."

Cut Nose knew John was taunting him. He looked at the Indians, saw them moving uneasily, and knew they were afraid. Well, so was he. But the Pale Face was laughing at him.

"I'll stay," he said.

Netnokwa tried to make John change his mind, but he refused. "No, my mother," he said. "I must stay." Netnokwa finally understood that John had to stay for some reason of his own. She

left him some food, shook her head, and said she would wait for him at the fort.

When she had gone, John took his blankets to a hollow surrounded by a low mound with a few trees. "Here is a good place to sleep," he said. "We can watch the ghosts fighting while we rest."

Cut Nose grabbed a piece of dried buffalo and began to chew on it. "You can watch," he said. "I'm going to sleep."

John built a fire and rolled up in his blanket near Cut Nose. He looked at the stars, saw the moon rising, heard the wind rustling in the willows bordering the river, and finally fell asleep.

After some time he awakened, and saw that Cut Nose had disappeared. He sat up with a start and his mouth fell open. Right before him, on the far side of the fire, now a bed of red coals, he saw two Indian braves come up out of the ground, and sit down by the fire. He stared at them. They stared back, their eyes big black holes.

Finally when his breathing had quieted, John decided to get up and talk to them. If they were real, they would answer him. If not—they would just sink back into the ground. His knees shaking, John got to his feet and started around the fire speaking Ojibway. But there was no answer. The braves had disappeared like smoke. John rubbed his eyes and looked again. He stood stiff, listening. But all he could hear was the wind whistling

through the trees, waving the branches like moss cradles.

John laughed. He must have been dreaming, that was it. So he put more wood on the fire, rolled up in his blanket, and decided that Cut Nose had sneaked after the others. He went to sleep, smiling. But he soon wakened. This time he heard voices. He leaned on his elbow. The moon was shining right down on him. John sat up abruptly. He saw two heads rise out of the ground. Up and up they came, their hair tufts decorated with eagle feathers. Now he saw the two bodies, naked to the waist. They were coming towards him, their hands on their knives in their beaded belts. John got to his feet. He tried to run but his feet seemed hobbled.

Then a voice like the wind and the rain and the blizzard came to him. "Look at the top of the hill behind you," it said.

John was almost too frightened to look, for fear they would jump at him. But he decided that he had better obey. He looked over his right shoulder, and on top of the mound saw a horse. Quickly he looked back at the ghosts.

"There is a horse for you to take on your journey," said the other brave.

John could not believe his ears or his eyes. He put up his hands and pressed them against his eyelids. He must be dreaming. He pinched his

cheek. No, he was awake. He could feel pain. He opened his eyes again and looked past the fire. But there was no sign of the braves. There was nothing but the embers of the fire—and the wind making the leaves dance on the trees.

John fell asleep just before dawn, and soon wakened to a whirring of wings. He sat up slowly. Prairie chickens were on the mound. They were going to dance. He forgot everything except that he must see them. While the hens circled them and watched them, the cocks gathered together, nodding and skipping about as they made a purring sound. Ruffling out their feathers, they beat the mound with their feet, leaped over each other, rattling, stamping, drumming, and crowing. The hens, circling them, reminded John of squaws watching a dance of the braves.

Braves! John suddenly remembered the ghosts. As he jumped up, the prairie chickens took fright and departed with a whir of wings. John ran to the top of the mound. The braves had shown him a horse. There it was, hobbled and feeding just a few yards away. He caught the horse, took off the wooden hobbles, loaded his furs on its back, and rode towards the Assiniboine River. When he caught up with Net-nokwa just before noon, she was so glad to see him safe that she hugged him.

"I am so happy, my son," she said.

"The ghosts gave me this horse," said John.

But when he got to the fort he discovered that the horse belonged to the trader. John told him about the ghosts, and the trader laughed. "When you see them again, thank them for sending back my horse," he said. "And if they come to see me, I'll give them some tobacco."

Cut Nose too laughed when John told the story. "You were dreaming," he scoffed.

"Perhaps," said John, grinning. "But you were afraid to stay and dream too."

"I wasn't," denied Cut Nose. "I just decided to go and look for a coon."

But when asked if he had found a coon, Cut Nose shrugged and turned away.

9. *Left Behind*

When winter came John found that he was left to keep his family in food. Red Thunder had married an Ojibway girl and, because he had no gifts for her parents, he had to go and hunt with them for a year.

Now in Netnokwa's lodge lived Big Hunter's two younger wives and their children, as well as Crocus, the twelve-year-old slave girl whom Netnokwa had bought from a wandering tribe. Crocus was tiny and scared looking when she came, but Netnokwa bathed her, combed her long, matted hair, and gave her new clothes.

They would have lived well if it had not been for an accident. One morning John got ready to go to his traps. But before leaving he took off his brass and silver ornaments and hung them in their buffalo-skin lodge.

"Why do you leave your ornaments today?" asked Netnokwa.

"They are a nuisance on the hunt, and they are cold," replied John.

"They might be taken from the lodge," said Netnokwa, who was getting ready to go with the other women to visit a neighboring lodge for a few days.

"They'll be safe with Crocus and Kisho," said John.

Netnokwa shrugged, finished her packing and gave Crocus and the little boy, Kisho, instructions to take good care of the lodge while she was away.

"I want to go too," said little Kisho, his lips pouting.

Crocus picked him up. "Stay with me, Kisho, and we will build up the fire and play *pepengunegun*."

Kisho wriggled out of her arms and ran to get the seven conical-shaped bones that were strung on a leather thong about eight inches long. John had bored holes in the sides of the bones and notched each one with his knife to show its value of four, six, or nine points. At one end of the thong he had put a squirrel's tail, and at the other a wooden handle, about four inches long and pointed on one end.

After Netnokwa left, John watched the children. Crocus took the handle, swung the bones around and around until they stood upright, then with a quick twist of her wrist, she inserted the pointed end of the handle into the hole of one of the bones as it descended.

"Let me, let me," cried Kisho. Crocus gave him the bones.

John took his axe, a hunting knife, tea, and pemmican, flung his flintlock gun over his shoulder, and set off on snowshoes to see his traps and lay a new marten trap-walk. As he swung through the trees, feathery snow fell from the trees, but he was so intent on watching for tracks that he did not notice it. When he came to where the tracks crossed each other, he flung down his pack, cut down a few boughs, sharpened the ends and drove them into the ground. Working quickly, he soon had a semicircular trap built as Big Hunter had taught him.

Nearing sunset John finished setting his traps and, flinging a couple of rabbits that he had shot over his shoulder, he started homeward. When he reached the ridge overlooking his camp his heart gave a bound. Where his lodge should have been, flames were leaping skyward. He started to run, sick with fear that the children might be burned to death. But he found the children safe.

"We built up the fire and started to meet you," said Crocus between her sobs.

"You should have stayed inside and watched the fire," said John, watching the fire die down and wondering what Netnokwa would say when she learned that her clothes, skin-stretchers, and blankets had been eaten up by flames.

"Your brass ornaments are gone," said Crocus.

"Perhaps we'll find them in the ashes," comforted John.

But later when they looked all they found was the medicine bag that Netnokwa had made of beaver skin and decorated with porcupine quills.

"Our medicine bag is safe," said Crocus. "So the Good Manitou will look after us."

"Maybe," said John. "But tonight you will have to sleep in the ashes to keep from freezing."

The next morning Netnokwa returned. "In my dreams I saw a fire," she said, "and I knew I should return." When she heard that Crocus had left the fire, she picked up a stick to punish her. But Crocus grabbed her around the knees.

"Oh, my mother," she cried, "do not beat me."

"You burned our lodge," said Netnokwa, "and you say not to beat you."

"I know," sobbed Crocus. "But I will repay you." She ran and got the medicine bag. "See, I saved this. I give you the Good Manitou. He will come if you do not beat me."

Netnokwa took the medicine bag, looked at the little girl for a minute, then threw down her stick. "I will not beat you now," she said, "but maybe later."

Crocus scrambled away to look after Kisho, and Netnokwa looked at John. "Go, my son," she said, "and tell our friends of our trouble. Send them to help me rebuild our lodge; then go to the fort. The good trader Chaboillez will give you

credit. Bring back blankets, clothes, and food so that we can live."

John set off for Portage la Prairie, telling friends of their misfortune. When he returned, after trading, he saw a lodge covered with buffalo hides near where their old one had stood. He learned that his friends had brought Netnokwa the hides and helped her build the tepee, then had gone hunting and brought her fresh meat.

When the family was alone again, Netnokwa called Crocus to her side. "You promised to give me the Great Manitou," she said. "Now how are you going to keep your promise?"

Crocus hung her head but did not answer, and Netnokwa saw tears rolling down her cheeks. She put her hands on her shoulders.

"Are you going to beat me?" asked Crocus, trembling.

"No, Crocus," said Netnokwa gently. "I bought you not for a slave to ill-treat, but for a daughter. But never again must you say to me or to anyone else that you can do something when you know that you can't do it. The Great Manitou is powerful. Little girls must not speak with crooked tongues."

Then she set Crocus to making moccasins and said no more about the matter. But Crocus knew that she had been wrong to make impossible promises, and she was very sober as she worked.

John, seeing her downcast face, made her a willow whistle to cheer her up.

Spring came early that year and Netnokwa's family moved to the Souris River for sugaring. The whole world was being reborn again, but John did not feel the joy of new life around him. He could hear laughter and talk in the sugaring camp, and singing around the warriors' fires as they checked their guns, powder, and shot bags, and mended their feather headdresses.

John had watched them add goose-down fluffles to the base and the tips of the eagle feathers in their headbands and to their bustles and arm rosettes. The younger warriors trimmed their hair roaches, made of long fringes of porcupine hair and shorter fringes of deer tail. Tied with leather thongs to beaded headbands and adorned with feathers, according to how many raids they had been on, they seemed to John almost as grand as old chiefs' war bonnets.

On the next day a band of Assiniboines, Crees, and Ojibways were setting out to help the Mandans attack their common enemy—the Sioux. John wanted to go with them, but Netnokwa refused. He must stay and help feed the old men and the women and children while they made maple syrup. But I'm seventeen, thought John; I must go.

Determined to make Netnokwa change her mind he went looking for her. He found her smoking her pipe and watching a kettle of boiling sap. He flung himself down beside her.

"Back from the chase already, my son?" she said, removing her pipe.

"I'm not hunting today," said John.

"Must the children's stomachs go empty then?" asked Netnokwa.

"The warriors could hunt before they leave," said John. "Then I could go with them."

Netnokwa's smile faded. "You are not a warrior, my son," she said.

"It's about time I am," declared John.

Netnokwa looked at him quietly. "You are still young. You will have plenty of time to become a warrior."

"I'm seventeen and I can shoot as well as any of them."

"That is why you must stay with us," said Netnokwa.

John saw that there was no relenting in her eyes. He turned back into the woods. When he came back at night, the Indians were singing, while preparing for a dance in which both the men and women would take part. John leaned against a tree and watched. He saw some musicians shaking gourds partly filled with stones; others were knocking two bones together or

drawing sticks, with deer hoofs fastened to the end, along a notched board. As their bodies swayed to the music, their voices were raised in song.

For the dance the men lined up on one side, the women on the other. Shuffling their feet, they moved sideways a few steps, then back again. Sometimes they whirled around and took up the steps where they had left off. Sometimes the men jumped into the air, but always there was the steady beat of music, the steady rumble of voices. And the bells or bones fastened to dresses and jackets made a jingling sound through the music. It was midnight before the dancing ceased. John went to sleep determined that in spite of Netnokwa he would take his gun and follow the warriors.

Awake at dawn he slid out of his blanket and saw that Netnokwa was still asleep. Now was the time to slip away so she would think he had gone hunting. He tiptoed to the corner where he had left his gun. It was gone. So were his moccasins. Baffled, he was undecided what to do next. He felt someone watching; he swung around. Netnokwa's face was calm, her eyes closed, but he was sure now that she was just pretending to be asleep. And he knew that she had hidden his gun and moccasins. He felt like screaming at her, demanding that she give them back, but he knew it

would be useless. She would pretend innocence until the warriors were on their way, when his gun and moccasins would reappear.

He sat down and tied old skins around his feet. Then he took his bow and arrows and left the lodge. He was determined to beg the warriors to take him along.

The night's frost had filmed the little pools with ice that broke under his feet. The cold water seeped through the skins, chilling his feet. But John did not care. He saw the warriors leaving on their march and ran after them.

"I'm going with you," he cried.

Little Assiniboine looked down from his horse. "Where are your moccasins?" he asked.

John knew better than to tell the chief that Netnokwa had hidden them, for he was her friend. Then he heard a loud laugh and saw Cut Nose.

"Falcon, he is tough. He is not afraid of ghosts." Again Cut Nose laughed. "Perhaps he would fight the Sioux barefooted."

John felt his face going red, but he turned to the chief. "Some of your men have more moccasins than they need. They could lend me a pair," he said.

"You need many pairs to march to the Sioux country," said Little Assiniboine.

"Perhaps Black Falcon thinks he is better with

a bow and arrow than the Sioux," said Cut Nose.

"I have used arrows well," retorted John, "but if you lend me a gun I will bring back many scalps."

The chief motioned the men on and the march continued. John ran alongside the chief. "Take me," he said. "I can help even with a bow."

But the chief shook his head, and when Cut Nose shouted with laughter other young warriors joined him. John stopped running, biting his lower lip to keep from crying. It was no use. They wouldn't help him. He turned back to his lodge, Cut Nose's mocking laughter ringing in his ears.

Netnokwa looked up from putting the iron kettle on the fire. "Falcon is needed here," she said. "He can get enough furs to buy a horse."

"If you had let me go with them, I could have brought back a horse as a prize," said John gloomily.

"If you came back," said Netnokwa, "and did not leave your scalp on a Sioux's belt." She dished up his breakfast. "Now sit down and eat."

But John was too disappointed to be hungry. He saw an old pair of moccasins beside his blanket. They were very much patched, but he knew that Netnokwa had put them there so he could wear them until the warriors were well away. For a minute he felt like going out without putting

them on, but his feet were cold. He put them on, ate his breakfast and, taking his bow and arrows, left the lodge.

The next morning his moccasins were beside him when he woke, and a few days later John found his gun in its usual place. He asked no questions as he took it and went out hunting again. That day he snared a rabbit and, hiding it under his jacket, took it back to his lodge. As Netnokwa was out, he slipped the live rabbit into an iron stewing pot and put the lid on it.

When Netnokwa returned John was busy cleaning his gun. He waited, trying not to smile, until she went to get the kettle to cook their dinner. At last she picked it up and lifted the lid. As the rabbit leaped out at her Netnokwa let out a frightened shriek. John rolled on the ground, laughing, and the rabbit jumped about, trying to escape from the lodge.

"Black Falcon is a bad son," she said, "to play tricks like that on his mother."

But John couldn't stop laughing, and slowly Netnokwa began to grin, then chuckle, and finally she was laughing as hard as John.

"I thought you would like a fresh rabbit stew," said John, when he could talk.

"Not so fresh that it jumps out of pot before it is cooked," said Netnokwa.

10. *The Medicine Man*

The warriors returned with neither scalps for their belts nor stolen horses to ride. So there was no feasting or rejoicing. John continued his hunting, often with Cut Nose, as Netnokwa had let him come to live in her lodge to help feed her relatives.

One morning, when the first ice was on the Assiniboine River, the two young men surprised a herd of elk in a meadow by the river. They fired from the trees and the elk, taken by surprise, milled around bumping into each other. On one side of them was the river, on the other the hunters and the smell of gunpowder. Some of them fled to the trees, the others bounded down the river bank.

John ran towards the river. He saw a dozen of the antlered beasts skidding about on the ice. If he had not been so anxious to get at least one of them, he could have laughed at the sight. They

looked so funny bumping and jostling each other as their feet skidded beneath them.

Just as he had his gun raised to fire, there was a crash. The ice splintered and the elk floundered about in the water. John held his fire. The elk scrambled for a footing and finally managed to reach the bank almost beneath John. They bounded past him, but before they disappeared he fired twice. He was sure he had wounded one or two of them and, with only a glance at Cut Nose, who was running towards the falling elk, John gave chase. All afternoon he followed the elk and finally caught up with the wounded ones and killed them. It was dark when he returned to Netnokwa's lodge. He could smell fresh venison roasting on the spits, and saw Cut Nose, sitting beside Netnokwa, eating.

"Yes, this elk I killed is very good," he said, grinning.

"You killed?" said John, sure that it had been his shot that had struck the elk.

Netnokwa looked at John. "Yes, Cut Nose killed an elk. He is a very good hunter. He brought it back to me." She smiled at Cut Nose, then turned back to John. "And you, my son, have you come home empty-handed?"

"I killed two elk—and the one you eat," John said quietly.

Cut Nose laughed. "How could Falcon kill two or three elk, when I killed them? Tomorrow you

will see. Falcon will bring them in and we will have plenty to eat." He filled his mouth with venison and gave John a mocking glance.

John squatted down on the mat and reached for a piece of venison. "You killed two more elk? Then you know where to find them."

"Enough for me to kill," said Cut Nose with a shrug. "You can bring them in. I'll tell you where to find them."

"Where?" asked John.

"Follow the track of the elk from the river," said Cut Nose grinning. "You're a smart tracker, Falcon; you find them."

"I can do better than that," said John. "I can tell you the exact spot where they lie."

Netnokwa looked from John to Cut Nose. "Tomorrow you will both tell the women the exact spot," she said. "And if they find elk where Cut Nose says he shot them, then Falcon talks with forked tongue. But if they find them where Falcon says, then Cut Nose has forked tongue. He must leave our lodge."

John met Netnokwa's glance and smiled. He knew that he had not lied and tomorrow would prove it. But in the morning Cut Nose had disappeared.

"Now we know who has forked tongue," said Netnokwa, and sent the women to bring back the elk. "Soon I will make a new coat for Falcon. He is getting too big for his old one."

The summer John was nineteen he bought a horse, a milky-white pinto with red spots around his head and neck, and a long silvery mane and tail. It was the first horse John had owned and he brushed his sides until they were as shiny as a muskrat's pelt. He named him Wawpoos because he was spotted like a rabbit changing from its winter coat to its summer one. And he taught him to come to him when he whistled.

Sometimes it seemed as if he had never lived in Ohio, never had brothers or sisters, or rocked a baby, pinching him so he could get outside to gather walnuts. It all seemed like a story, but sometimes at night he would dream about his family and would waken with tears on his cheeks.

Sometimes he told Netnokwa about his dreams and his hopes of seeing his family again. But she would persuade him that his family was dead, and then he would go off and hunt and think that perhaps she was right. Then one day while hunting on the Red Deer River, John met Mr. Charles, a trader who was going to England.

"Come with me, Falcon," said Mr. Charles, when he heard his story. "I will take you to London and you can tell about your life among the Indians."

"I would rather go to Ohio than to England," said John.

"You told me your people were massacred," said Mr. Charles.

"I know. But I keep hoping that Weasel was not telling the truth," said John.

Mr. Charles shrugged. He did not think it likely that John's people were alive, and he thought it would be exciting to take John to London. "You don't want to spend the rest of your life with the Indians, do you?" he asked.

"No," John agreed.

"Then think it over," urged Mr. Charles. "It would be a new adventure for you."

John was tempted to go with him, but as he brushed Wawpoos' mane, the older Indians warned him against it. "Long ago the white men took some of our relatives across the big water," they said. "They never came back." They looked at Wawpoos. "Now you have a horse, you will be a buffalo runner. You will like that."

So when Mr. Charles was leaving, John told him that he had decided to stay with the Indians. And on his way back to Netnokwa's lodge he met a band of Indians and learned that one of them was a relative of Netnokwa's from the Ohio River. He asked him for news of his family and learned that Weasel had lied to him.

"It is true that they captured your brother," said the Ottawa Indian. "They found him in the field plowing. They grabbed him, killed the horse, and fled into the woods. They traveled most of the night, then tied your brother to a tree. But he got free and ran away from them."

"He left his cap behind," said John. "Weasel showed it to me when he said my family was dead."

The Indian shrugged. "Perhaps they thought you would not try to run away if you thought your family was dead."

"Maybe," said John. "But now that I know they are alive, I'm going back to see them."

The Indian shook his head. "I didn't say they were still alive," he said. "Perhaps they were killed another time."

But John would not think of that possibility. His family had not been massacred by Weasel, so they must be alive. He raced his pony back to camp and rushed to Netnokwa's lodge to tell her his news.

"I'm going back to Ohio," he cried.

"But you can't leave me alone after all these years," wailed Netnokwa. "You are like a son to me."

"When I am gone Red Thunder will look after you."

"You know better than that, Black Falcon," said Netnokwa. "He has his own family to look after. If you go, I'll be alone."

"You'll have friends."

Netnokwa gazed into the fire, her eyes filled with tears. "It is the custom of our people to care for their friends," she admitted. "But when they get old and useless, they leave them to die."

John felt an ache growing inside him. Netnokwa spoke only too truly. He had seen the very old or useless left behind with just enough provisions to last them a few days. And in her way Netnokwa had loved him. He knew that he could not leave her to such a fate.

"You will never be old," he said, "and you can still do the work of two women in the lodge."

"Many moons have come and gone for me, and in my dreams I see sickness." Netnokwa looked at him, and a tear rolled down her cheek. John got up from his mat and started for the tent flap. He heard a deep sigh behind him, and turned. Netnokwa's shoulders were slumped. He went back and put his hand on her shoulder.

"I will stay until the budding of the leaves," he said.

Netnokwa's face brightened with a smile. "I did not think my son would leave me," she said, reaching for her basket of beads. "And now I will make him new garters."

John left the tent filled with a vague uneasiness. Netnokwa must not think that she would always be able to bribe him into staying with her by making him fancy ornaments or new clothes, much as he liked them.

When John was twenty he went with Red Thunder and the Indians to harvest rice on Red Deer River. But while collecting the grain, the

whole band took sick. Their voices grew hoarse and they coughed as with a bad cold. Then their noses began to bleed and their ears ached. Some of them died. And John too fell ill. He wakened with a ringing in his ears. He could hear Bear, the medicine man, shaking his rattle and singing in a high voice; then the ringing in his ears shut out even the Bear's voice.

Two days later, when John returned to consciousness, he saw the gaunt face of Bear bending over him.

"What are you doing to me?" John asked.

"I am making you well," said Bear, standing up so that his bear skins, hanging from his shoulders, dropped to his knees.

John saw that he was in the medicine man's hut. A fire was burning beneath a kettle of boiling dog meat. Netnokwa sat beside it watching Bear caper about, singing and shaking his rattle. Suddenly he bent over John again.

"It is the bad fire in Black Falcon's breast that speaks to me," he said.

John tried to protest. The sickness was more in his ears and head. He tried to speak but his voice caught in his throat.

"I will bring the sickness out," said Bear.

John watched him go to the fire, plunge his hand into the boiling stew and pull out the head of a dog. He danced about the fire, biting off chunks of the hot meat, then throwing the bones

into the fire. John knew that he had rubbed something on his hands and arms and even chewed it so that he could stick his hand into the boiling water and chew food that would burn anyone else's mouth.

Then Bear was at his side again, kneeling, and placing his mouth against his back. "The sickness is here, Netnokwa," he said. "For ten beaver I will take it away."

"Make him well and I will give you ten beaver," said Netnokwa.

Bear grunted and began to rub John's back, holding a bowl in one hand. Suddenly he stopped and stood up. "This is the poison," he said, and tossed the bowl into the fire. With a hiss it broke into flames, and Bear folded his arms across his chest. "Now Black Falcon will live."

John groaned. He knew Bear had sprinkled the bowl with gunpowder to make it burst into flame. Then Netnokwa was at his side, putting her hand on his forehead, which was still hot.

"Black Falcon is still very sick," she said. "You have not earned your ten beaver."

Bear scowled. "Leave me alone with him," he said, reaching for his medicine bag. "I will make him well."

Netnokwa sighed. "For ten beaver you must try hard," she said.

Bear grunted, sat down beside John, and opened his medicine bag. He fingered herbs, ani-

mal claws, teeth, bird talons, and colored feathers. Finally he pulled out a snakeskin. He stroked it, mumbling to himself.

John's heart began to pound. What was Bear going to do now? He tried to keep his eyes open, but the medicine man's chanting sent him into a sleep filled with nightmares. When he awakened he saw that his nose had been bleeding and his head felt very light. Bear's hands were on his chest, and with a twist of his wrist he pulled up a wriggling thing.

"A snake," said John, gasping for breath.

"A snake!" echoed Netnokwa, who had returned while he was sleeping.

Bear gave them a haughty glance. "Yes. Snake in Black Falcon's chest. Now it is out. Black Falcon will get well."

"Where is the hole?" asked John, looking at his bare chest.

"Hole open, then close," said Bear calmly.

"How could it?" asked John.

Bear's black eyes flashed angrily. "Black Falcon very stupid if he does not know that Bear can open and shut holes," he said sharply.

Netnokwa grunted. "I will take Falcon to my tent," she said, and in spite of Bear's objections, she wrapped John up in a blanket and with the help of her friends took him home.

For a week John was very ill; finally he was

able to get up and walk. But he found that he had become quite deaf.

"Black Falcon will never hunt again," the Indians said.

John thought they were right. The wild animals were timid and he would not be able to creep up on them without making a noise. They would flee before he could raise his gun.

"I have no medicine to make you hear," said Bear. "You can help the women in camp."

John turned away and went into the woods and lay down. If only he could find his way back to Ohio. But he knew he could not travel alone when he could hardly hear a sound. For days he brooded, and Netnokwa told him he should be glad to be alive. But John would not be comforted. He thought he would rather be dead than a burden to his friends.

For hours he sat in the lodge refusing to talk even to Netnokwa. Then one night, before they broke camp to return to their winter quarters, John loaded his gun and lay down on his blanket. Tomorrow he would shoot himself. Netnokwa, pretending to work on moccasins, watched him.

In the morning they mounted their horses and left the camp, John holding his horse back until the others had a good start. He couldn't hear the birds singing or the sound of the horses' feet preceding him. As soon as a hollow in the prairie

hid the rest from view, he got off his horse and turned him loose.

Then, before he could change his mind, he put the butt of his gun on the ground, the barrel against his head, and pressed the trigger with his toe. There was a hollow click, but the gun did not fire. Surprised, John examined the gun. It was empty.

"It's the work of Netnokwa," he said, feeling unreasonably angry, and reached for his powder bag, only to find that it too was empty. He threw the gun on the ground. He didn't know whether he was glad or sorry. Then feeling the warm sun on his body, he began to feel ashamed. Killing himself wouldn't have been a very brave thing to do. He was still young and life was full of adventure. When he got well he could still go back and find his own people. He stretched out on the ground and thought of them. Winter was coming and for an instant he had a vision of a childhood Christmas at home.

He saw his family sitting around a table laden with steaming dishes. There was turkey, ham, baked squash, potatoes and gravy. There was Christmas pudding and pies, butter as yellow as marigolds, and corn bread just as yellow. He saw himself leaving the table to look at the Christmas tree decorated with candles, strings of popcorn, and gay bits of paper. Remembering, John swallowed a lump that rose in his throat, and

looked around. He wasn't at home. He was lying on the prairie and his horse was gone. He would have a long walk to catch up with Netnokwa.

He sat up and whistled. Wawpoos did not appear. But a few minutes later he saw Netnokwa riding toward him, leading Wawpoos.

"Horse throw you, my son?" she asked.

John started to deny it, then saw a twinkle in her eyes. "You talk in your sleep, Falcon," she said. "Then in a dream I saw you losing your horse."

John smiled at her. "Thank you, my mother," he said, mounting his horse, and Netnokwa knew he was thanking her not only for bringing back his horse, but for saving his life.

11. *Lost in the Snow*

That year winter arrived on the prairie in November. The flat land and the marshes, spiked with dwarfed gray and red willows and surrounded with reeds, were hidden beneath the snow, which the wind tossed into sprays that burned the cheeks and stung the eyes of the hunters on the plains.

In the lodges the women worked on skins and kept the fires burning night and day, while the men hunted to keep them from starving.

Everyone worked. When Crocus was not beading moccasins, she made fur tassels. John watched her cut up brown beaver pelts and pure white weasel skins into strips not quite an inch in width. After soaking them, she tied strings to the ends of the strips, twisted the fur around like a corkscrew and fastened the ends to stakes driven into the wall of their lodge.

After twenty-four hours the strips were dried and remained twisted. Crocus took off the

strings, fastened bright bits of cloth to them, and put them up in clusters of six for John to sell to the chiefs for decorating themselves or their pipes.

But life was not all work. The hunters found time to play their favorite game—lacrosse. John loved this game that took courage and endurance and even a sense of humor in the struggle to capture the bladder-ball with their bats and toss it to the adversaries' post. This was no easy task as the posts were far apart. At one moment they would be in a huddle. One of the players would capture the ball; running and dodging, he would toss it away from his post. Then followed a rough fight as the others tried to recapture it. Back and forth it flew between the bats, and just when John was sure his side would make a goal, the ball would come flying back, the players after it. But when a goal was scored, there was always a great deal of cheering and laughter from the spectators. And the game would go on until sunset.

John spent many long evenings whittling. He made toys out of wood and flute whistles. Just before Christmas he made Netnokwa a new stem for her pipe. Coming back from his beaver traps he cut an inch-thick branch off an ash tree. That evening he took twelve inches of it and burned a hole through the center. With his hunting knife, he cut off bits of bark, making a pattern of stars

and crescent moons. Tossing chips of green hardwood on the camp fire, he held the carved stem in the smoke until it was a dark brown. He polished off the excess smoke, leaving a golden-brown surface. Then he peeled off the rest of the bark and fastened the stem to a carved stone pipe-bowl.

"It is beautiful," said Netnokwa, looking at the brown stars and moons against the creamy white of the ash wood. John was pleased, and went back to his hunting.

That winter John brought in so many hides that Netnokwa could hardly do all the work. Crocus married Picheto, a young medicine man, and the other women were living in other lodges. Without their help, Netnokwa often grew tired. One evening she gave a big sigh, and put down the moose hide she was curing.

"What is the matter?" asked John. "Are you ill?"

"Not ill," said Netnokwa. "But I am growing old. I am hardly able to keep you in moccasins."

"You're not old," said John. "Your hair is still as black as a crow's wing."

But Netnokwa did not cheer up. "You are becoming a great hunter, Falcon," she said. "You should have a strong young woman to help you."

John laughed. "Come, my mother, no more such talk. I am going to make you a beading loom."

A few days later when he came in from his traps, Netnokwa had the loom on her lap. "I'm making you arm and leg bands to match your knife sheaf and shot bag," she said, sorting out beads as blue as the sky, rusty-red as the bitter-sweet, and green as the moss on the north side of the forest trees.

John thought she had forgotten that he needed another woman in his lodge, but she returned to the subject as she worked at his garters.

"I don't want a young woman," he protested.

"Give it thought and you will," said Netnokwa. "Chief Little Beaver, who is brave and respected by all, wishes to give you his daughter." She rushed on before John could interrupt. "Marry her and you will have powerful friends; and I will not have to do all the work in your lodge."

"I do not wish to marry yet," said John.

"You are twenty years old, Falcon. It is time you have a woman in your lodge."

"I have you, my mother," said John, trying to laugh her out of the idea. "You are woman enough for me, and I will not marry Little Beaver's daughter."

Netnokwa threw up her hands. "It is all arranged. I have already spoken with him and the girl is willing."

"You have no right to choose my wife," said John.

"It is the parents' right to choose a wife for their son," said Netnokwa. "I was only thinking of your welfare."

"I know . . . I know," said John, seeing that Netnokwa was hurt by his words. "But I wish no other woman in my lodge."

"Tomorrow Little Beaver comes to our lodge to talk with you," she said.

"Tell him I'm away hunting," said John, and rolled up in his blanket and went to sleep.

He rose at dawn, took his gun and spent the day tracking down an elk. When he returned he crept up to the lodge on tiptoe, fully determined to stay away if the girl was inside. But he saw that Netnokwa was alone.

The next morning Netnokwa told him she would make him a jacket of the elk skin if he would prepare it. So he soaked the skin in melted snow water for three days, and between trapping trips, he prepared a graining pole by removing the bark and rounding off all the sharp points. Taking his scraping tool, a stick with an old file pushed into the end, he placed the wet hide over the graining pole with the hair side up, and began to scrape off the hair.

His arms and shoulders ached before he was finished but he set about washing it again and then laced it tightly to a drying frame. He cooled

the elk's brains, which he had left simmering over the fire, and mashed them into a smooth paste. This he rubbed over the hide until it was almost dry. He removed the hide from the frame and put it into a kettle of warm water, squeezing with his hands until the water oozed through every part of the hide. Wringing it out, he quickly laced it back into the frame. Then he took a rubbing stick of hardwood and rubbed the thin, sharp edge all over the hide.

"Rub quickly on both sides," said Netnokwa, "or it will not be soft."

John obeyed; and when it was ready for smoking, he sewed it into a sack, tied it on a bar and dug a smoke hole beneath it. He made a fire of cedar chips and banked it until the flames were covered and smoke rose into the bag. When he opened the bag, he found that the elk hide was a golden brown. He took it to Netnokwa.

"You can make my jacket now," he said.

"Not yet," replied Netnokwa. "Fold it and put it away for a few days to set the color."

John was anxious to see the jacket but he obeyed.

Finally she started work on the jacket. And when it was finished it had a fringed yoke, bead embroidery, and deer-hair fringes on the sleeves. He could hardly wait to go out hunting in it.

"It is worth all the time spent on it," he said.

Netnokwa grunted. "If you had a wife of your

own, we both would have been saved a great deal of work," she said.

John laughed and went off for a few days of trapping with Red Thunder, who had come to visit them. When they returned Little Beaver's daughter was seated on a mat beside Netnokwa. John gave his mother an angry glance as he went to sit on one mat and Red Thunder on another.

"I told you, my mother, I would not marry," he said, scowling. Red Thunder only grinned.

The girl looked from one young man to the other, and then at Netnokwa. John was ready to spring up and run from the lodge if she came towards him, which would be a sign that she chose him for her husband. But he sank back in relief when she walked over to Red Thunder and sat down beside him.

With a twinkle in her eye, Netnokwa said. "That is well. My eldest son is a great hunter. He needs two women in his camp to cure his skins. Black Falcon only needs an old woman."

John flushed at the insult and her taunt that Red Thunder was a better hunter than he was, but he let it pass, rather than have her choose his wife.

A few days later Red Thunder took his new wife back to his own lodge. John was so happy that he gave them gifts of furs and made plans for Red Thunder to return in January and go

fishing with him and White Head on Lake Manitoba.

January began bright and mild. Before setting off for Lake Manitoba, John ate a big breakfast and packed their camping goods and food on their toboggans. When he put the fishing nets, which Netnokwa had made by twisting and weaving the inner rind of willows into small lines, on top of the toboggans, he was ready.

Under a cold, sunny sky he followed Red Thunder and White Head. They skirted the spruce woods and headed for the west shore of the lake. The sun sparkled on the snow and the wind stung their cheeks, but traveling swiftly on their snowshoes they kept warm.

Two days later they reached the lake, gleaming dully where the wind had swept it clear of snow. They pitched their tent and, the next morning, took their nets out on the lake. They cut holes in the ice about six feet apart; then, armed with poles, they lowered the nets three to four feet down in the water. Holding one end, White Head pushed the other end to the next hole. John grabbed it with a spiked pole, then shoved it on to the next hole for Red Thunder to attach the end to a stake hammered into the ice. Covering the holes with branches and buffalo hides to keep them from freezing over, they returned to their camp.

The next day they went back to draw up their nets and reset them. It was cold work and the wind numbed their bodies. Often they had to stick their hands and arms into the cold water to pull out the nets of squirming fish that froze as soon as they were spilled out on the ice. They piled them on their toboggans and took them to camp.

After two weeks of fishing, they set off for the Souris Post, their toboggans loaded with pickerel, gold-eyes, bass, and whitefish. Soon they were out of sight of the small trees that straggled along the lake's shore. Ahead of them was open prairie.

John looked at the sky. There seemed to be several suns forming a cross. The bones of his face began to ache, and his breath froze on his clothes like hoar frost on the trees. Even his body was cold, though he felt himself perspiring. Behind him, Red Thunder and White Head pulled their toboggans, shuffling along on their snowshoes, their heads bent forward. The light dancing on the snow began to make John's eyes smart, and by noon black spots were floating in the air before him.

"Rub burnt wood around your eyes," said White Head, when they had finished their lunch and were putting out the camp fire.

John did as the chief suggested, rubbing not

only his eyelids but his cheeks with the blackened wood until he looked like a Negro. When they set out again he found that the sun's glare was not so hard on his eyes. In the middle of the afternoon, the blue of the sky turned to a milky-white. Flakes began to fall, at first gently, then whirling about so they could see only a few feet ahead.

"We can't go on in this storm," said Red Thunder. "We'll get lost."

"We'll freeze to death if we stop now," said John. "There's no shelter, or wood for a fire."

"Come," said White Head. "We're not far from a creek. We'll find shelter and wood there."

John staggered on. The whole landscape was wiped out and there was nothing but the sound of the wind and the whirling of the snow. It even muffled their voices and the scraping of the fish-laden toboggans. Fatigue began to drag at John's legs and his toes hurt as the snow packed against the strap of his snowshoes. But not for anything would he admit his exhaustion before White Head called a halt.

"We should be at the creek by now," he shouted.

"We've been going in a circle," said Red Thunder. "We're lost."

"Maybe," said White Head, trying to peer

through the snow for a sign of the creek. "Perhaps we'd better dig ourselves into the snow until the storm blows over."

"That might be for three days," said John.

"This storm will blow itself out in a few hours," said White Head.

Using their snowshoes for shovels, the men dug into a drift, making a sort of cave. They spread their buffalo robes, rolled up in their blankets and, drawing a buffalo robe over them, lay down side by side. John went off to sleep hearing his brother grumbling about not having a fire.

Aching in every joint, he awakened a few hours later, and saw that the snow had stopped falling. There were stars in the sky but the wind was still blowing.

"I'm freezing," mumbled Red Thunder.

John moved closer to his brother and tried to shake off the numbness that was seeping through him. He could hear White Head snoring, and finally he fell asleep.

John wakened shivering. The skin on his arms and legs felt cold and his bones ached. He began to think of his life with the Indians. He thought of warm fires blazing in their lodges, but still he shivered. Then pictures of his life in Ohio danced before him. Why hadn't he gone back? He had really intended to, but the months had slid by and he had been so busy keeping him-

self and Netnokwa fed and clothed. He wondered what they would be doing at home. Would they be sitting before the open fireplace talking about him?

Thinking about that, John could almost feel the warmth of the fire, but he was brought back to the present by the increasing cold in his bones. His breath was coming faster and he could hear the beating in his head. A dizziness kept him from raising his head.

White Head shook him but he could only mutter, "I'm freezing."

"Wake up, Falcon. Don't sleep." White Head's voice seemed to come from far off.

Sleep. That was it. He must sleep. In the morning White Head would find the creek and build a fire. John began to feel warm at the thought.

"Don't sleep or you will die." White Head's voice was close to his ear, but if dying meant this nice warm feeling, well then he would die. Blissfully he let himself go. Now he was dead. He was sure of it. Would he see his brothers and sisters? And would they have a fire? Of course they would and he would stretch out his hands to its warmth and talk to his family. For a moment he could not even think. Then he was sure he heard his brother's voice calling him, and he could feel his hand shaking him.

He forced his eyes open and looked right into

a blazing fire. He sighed. It was not the fireplace in his father's house but a camp fire surrounded by snow and dark shadows. He tried to shut it out of his mind so that he could go back to sleep. Then he saw a figure as tall as his father. But it had no beard. It wasn't his father, it was an Indian. John frowned. It was someone he should know.

"You all right?"

John tried to stand up but his feet were so numb he sat down, almost falling into the fire. The next thing he knew White Head was holding a cup of hot tea to his lips.

"Drink this," urged White Head.

John looked around him. "Where are we?" he asked.

"In the creek bed."

"How did we get here?"

White Head explained how he had not been able to waken John, and how he had discovered that they were camped within a few feet of the creek. He had wakened Red Thunder and together they had pulled John to the creek and built a fire.

"Where is Red Thunder?"

"He's getting wood," said White Head. "Here he comes."

Red Thunder dropped an armful of wood by the fire, then helped the chief take off John's moccasins and bathe his partly frozen feet with

snow. Soon John was wide awake and drinking another cup of tea, ready for the heated pemmican that White Head had prepared. When they were warmed through they lay down by the fire and waited for the sun to rise.

After more hot tea and food they dug their toboggans out of the snow and set off for the Post to trade in their fish before returning to Netnokwa's lodge.

I 2. "*Morning Sky*"

The spring John was twenty-two he fell in love. Sitting before his lodge, near Fort la Reine, John looked up from cleaning his musket and saw a Cree girl walking about smoking her pipe. The pipe in a girl's mouth wasn't unusual; but the slim girl dressed in white skins, beaded in gay patterns and fringed with elks' teeth that jingled as she walked, was the prettiest girl that John had ever seen. Her shiny black hair hung in thick braids below her waist and a beaded band circled her head. Her olive-tinted cheeks were dabbed with bright vermilion. When John caught her looking at him, he saw that her eyes were as soft as black velvet. He got up and joined her.

"You are new here," he said.

The girl nodded and peered up at John's gray eyes. Then her glance traveled from his dark brown hair, done in Indian fashion, down his long buckskin-clad body.

"What is your name?" asked John.



"Morning Sky," said John. "That is a pretty name."

"Morning Sky," she replied, her voice soft as rain pattering on pine boughs.

"Morning Sky," said John. "That is a pretty name."

"And you call yourself . . . ?" Morning Sky waited to hear his name.

"Here they call me Falcon, sometimes Black Falcon," said John.

Morning Sky's eyes studied him again. Then she passed him her pipe to show her approval. "Smoke?" she said.

"I do not smoke," said John.

Morning Sky turned away. "Don't go," said John.

"You do not wish to smoke my pipe," pouted Morning Sky.

"It isn't that I don't want to smoke your pipe," said John. "I just don't smoke."

Morning Sky still pouted, so John took her pipe. "I'll show you," he said, and took a few puffs and began to cough.

Morning Sky laughed. "I see you do not smoke," she said.

John heard a chuckle behind him and saw some of the squaws watching him. Never before had they seen John stop to talk to a girl.

"Let's go for a walk," said John abruptly.

They left the camp, following a path that brought them out on the prairie beside a crocus patch. Morning Sky picked some flowers

and John helped her stick them into her glossy braids.

“You will be staying in our camp?” he asked.

“Does Black Falcon care if I stay or go?” she asked.

“I do care.”

Smiling, Morning Sky turned back to the camp. “Maybe we will stay until the fall of the leaves,” she said.

In the days that followed John was always in a rush to get home from the hunt. Netnokwa teased him about his sudden attention to his clothes.

“Black Falcon takes another steam bath and dresses in his best clothes,” she said with lifted eyebrows. “Is it that there is a Council to attend?”

John, trying to appear casual, shrugged and went off to the steam bath. He had to stoop to enter the bent-willow tent covered with skins. Then for an hour he poured cold water on hot stones and, while steam flowed around him, rubbed his muscled arms and legs. When he felt that he had had enough steam, he left the bath and dived into the river. He swam about for a while, then climbed out, his whole body tingling and alive. Carefully he braided his long hair and put a beaded band about his forehead. Then taking his bone flute, he went about the camp playing Indian airs. At last he saw Morn-

ing Sky slip out of her tent and walk towards the trees. He followed her far into the woods. They sat on the grass and while he played tunes on his flute, she sang for him.

One morning, after John had been courting Morning Sky, Netnokwa wakened him by hitting him with a small branch on the soles of his bare feet. "Get up, young man," she said. "Get up and go hunting. Your young woman will think more of you if you return with food than if you lie around the camp playing your flute."

John got up and, without answering her, took his gun and left. He hoped to bring back a moose and gain Netnokwa's praise, so that she would accept Morning Sky as his wife, and welcome her into their lodge.

Stepping swiftly away from the camp, he met Cut Nose, who had lately returned with tales of having been on raids against the Sioux. He swore that he had brought back many scalps, and there had been two hanging from his belt. John hadn't believed his stories, and still remembered the older boy's taunts and tricks. And lately he had seen him in Morning Sky's lodge. But he would not believe that she would prefer Cut Nose to him.

"Going hunting?" asked Cut Nose, his gun in hand.

"Yes," said John, shifting his powder horn on his shoulder.

“I’ll come with you.”

John wanted to go alone, but he could think of no good reason why Cut Nose should not accompany him. So they set off, John leading the way along a winding path.

After two hours of following the Assiniboine River, they saw moose tracks. Stepping swiftly, they followed them, John pointing now and again to freshly broken willow tops where the moose had been eating. They stepped softly around the edge of a willow thicket, but in spite of their caution a twig snapped beneath their feet. The noise startled a moose and a cow resting after their morning feeding. They just had time to see the cow head for the trees, while the moose, with antlers that stretched almost six feet across, bounded off in another direction.

“I’ll follow the moose,” said Cut Nose. “You take the cow.”

John bit his lower lip. He would have liked to shoot the moose, but if Cut Nose thought he would show himself a superior hunter that way, let him try. So John followed the cow for half a mile and caught up with her as she stood with lifted head listening to the sound of Cut Nose’s moose-horn trying to lure the moose out into the open.

John fired for the cow’s heart. She bounded up in the air, then crashed to the ground. While he was bleeding her, John heard Cut Nose’s

gun go off, followed by a crashing through the bushes not more than two hundred yards away. John reloaded his gun and started for the sound, expecting any minute to hear another shot. But there was no sound. Thinking that Cut Nose must have killed the moose with his first shot, John started back to the cow. Then he heard Cut Nose shouting for help.

Running toward the sound, John came out in a clearing and saw the moose, wounded in the shoulder, holding Cut Nose at bay behind an oak tree. Snorting and stamping, the moose circled the tree while Cut Nose pranced about with his knife in his hand, trying to keep the tree between himself and the enraged animal.

John looked around for Cut Nose's gun and saw it lying on the ground. Suppressing a grin because Cut Nose had insisted on chasing the bull, John fired. The moose tottered, struggled to his feet, then fell slowly to the ground. Cut Nose darted from behind the tree and drove his knife into the animal's heart.

"What happened?" asked John, reloading his gun.

"My shot just wounded him," muttered Cut Nose.

"I saw that," said John, grinning.

"Then when I went to reload I found that I had lost my powder horn," said Cut Nose.

“So you took to your heels,” said John, laughing.

Cut Nose grunted. “I was waiting for a chance to kill him with my knife, and I would have, too, if you hadn’t fired,” he said crossly.

“You would have danced around the tree all night before he gave you a chance to stab him,” said John.

Cut Nose shrugged. “I wasn’t worried. He was wounded and would have tired,” he said, and busied himself skinning the moose.

Hours later they trudged into camp laden down with meat, having cached the rest of it in the trees.

“I suppose you’ll tell everyone that you shot them both,” said Cut Nose sulkily.

John started to make a sharp reply, then stopped, realizing that Cut Nose did not want to be laughed at for letting a moose corner him. “Not unless you start boasting,” he said. “Besides, you put the first shot in him and that makes him yours.”

Cut Nose gave him a baleful glance and turned towards his own lodge without another word. John carried his meat to Netnokwa.

“Here’s the meat you ordered me to get,” he said, dropping it at her feet.

Netnokwa praised him and he went off to dress up in his finery and meet Morning Sky.

He took his canoe and paddled up the river to a group of poplar trees. The full moon was shining on the round leaves that danced in the light breeze, and John nosed his canoe in to shore. He jumped out and pulled the canoe up the bank and turned it on its side, then dropped down on the grass to wait for Morning Sky. So lightly did her moccasined feet press the grass that he did not hear her approach until she was at his side. He jumped to his feet.

"Morning Sky is late," he said softly.

"My father kept me late."

"Does he not wish you to marry me that we must meet in secret now?" he asked.

Morning Sky lifted her dusky face and the moon shone on her dark, somber eyes. "He says you are a pale face," she said.

"But I have lived with your relatives since I was a child," protested John.

Morning Sky clasped her slim brown hands together. "He says pale faces always stay pale faces. They give up the hunt and want to live in a house and have a garden."

John laughed. "There is little danger of my doing that," he said.

"My father says white men grow food at Pembina," persisted Morning Sky.

"Sure they do," agreed John. "The traders have gardens at Tobacco Creek too. But we do not live there. We live by the chase."

“My father wants me to marry a warrior,” muttered Morning Sky. “Or a young man who will soon be a warrior.”

John felt his cheeks begin to burn. It was true that he had never gone to fight with the Indians. They had always refused to take him. “You know I’m not afraid to fight,” he said. “You do not love me. Perhaps it is Cut Nose you would marry.”

Morning Sky pouted her lips at him. “My father says Cut Nose is a good hunter, and a brave warrior. Tonight he bring moose to our camp.”

“Marry him then,” said John, and set his jaws tight to keep from telling her how Cut Nose had got the moose. He turned his back and started for the river. Morning Sky ran after him and caught his arm.

“Your words pierce my heart like arrows,” she said. “But I cannot marry you without my father’s consent.”

John pushed aside her hand. “I have no scalps to hang to my belt like Cut Nose,” he said.

“You can be a warrior,” said Morning Sky.

“How?” He looked into her eyes that in the moonlight looked like woodland pools.

“Just before I left my lodge, a tobacco message came from Pembina,” she said hurriedly. “The Crees and the Ojibways are gathering to march on the Sioux.”

John felt his pulses beating rapidly. “Morn-

ing Sky," he said softly, and bent his head to kiss her, "I'll go with them. Promise me that you will not marry Cut Nose before I come back."

She put her hand on his chest, felt the beating of his heart, and looked at him with glowing eyes. "I will wait," she said, then turned and darted away through the bushes.

13. *On the Warpath*

John was tired. All day he had been riding on the march against the Sioux and the sides of his horse were glistening with sweat. John was hungry too. For no matter how long the day's march, he must not eat or drink until they made camp. He could not even sip from the water container that hung at his saddle.

He had left Pembina at dawn, following the warriors riding southward, buffalo robes trailing from their shoulders, their heads decorated with eagle feathers, and their faces painted. They were dressed lightly, ready at a moment's notice to fling aside their buffalo robes and attack the enemy, naked save for their loincloths.

It was John's first warpath and he rode behind with the other young warriors. Their faces were blackened and streaked with red; their topknots were ornamented with tails of mink and marten. Not until this raid was over would the young warriors have feathers in their topknots.

John shifted his shield on his left arm. He had made it himself from the shoulder hide of a buffalo. Filling a hole in the ground with hot stones, he had poured water over them and staked the hide over the steam to shrink it to the required size and thickness. When it was thick enough to ward off spears and arrows and even turn a musket ball, he had unpegged it, dried it over a rounded mound, painted it with vermilion-dyed rattlesnake skins and decorated it with colored feathers.

Thinking of the Sioux massacre at Pembina, John gripped his coupstick, decorated with horsehair and feathers, and tipped with a deadly flint arrow. Cottonwood, the father-in-law of Alexander Henry, who had built a North-West fort on the west bank of the Pembina River opposite Peter Grant's fort, had been shot down from a tree, where he had climbed to look for buffalo on the plains. The women had run to hide themselves in the bluffs while the men tried to hold back the Sioux. But before they were routed, the Sioux had killed several men, women, and children.

Tobacco messages had been sent out telling the Crees and Ojibways that Alexander Henry would give them powder, shot, and muskets to fight against the Sioux. As soon as Morning Sky had told John about it, he had hurried back to

his lodge and told Netnokwa that he was going with them.

"I will go with you to Pembina," Netnokwa had said.

John had been glad to have her with him. She had traded skins with the Nor'Westers for cabbages, onions, turnips, carrots, beets, potatoes, melons, and cucumbers. It was the first vegetable feed John had enjoyed since he was a child, and it tasted good after eating wild potatoes, rattail roots, and bittersweet bark. Riding along the trail, he remembered it and felt the gauntness of his stomach. He felt as if he hadn't eaten for a week.

He looked ahead at Chief Eagle, riding on a black horse beside Chief Peguis. His face was set and stern. His young son had been captured by the Sioux and made to run the gauntlet, dying before he reached the end of the row of savages who struck him as he ran. Beneath his buffalo robe, Chief Eagle carried a toy of his son's, which he hoped to leave on the battlefield so that his son's spirit would know that he had been avenged.

But he was not the only one seeking revenge. Many of the braves carried toys, bits of hair, or pieces of their children's clothing. Last night John had joined them in their scalp dance, prancing about the fort and lodges, carrying

scalps on poles, singing wildly and uttering unearthly yells to rouse a warlike mood in every man's breast.

The medicine men had made images—muzzine-neen—of the Sioux, putting hair from Sioux scalps on them. Then singing and swaying, they had struck the points of their knives into the heart of the images in the hope of bringing death to their enemies.

Chief Eagle called a halt at sunset to scan the country and decide where they should camp for the night. John and the other young warriors turned their faces towards their native country, to show the Great Manitou that they wished to return from the raid alive. The chief came to a sudden decision.

"We will camp there," he said, pointing to a bluff in the distance. Then he chose John and ten other young men to go ahead. "Go and prepare the *pushkwagumme-genahgun* for our *ko-zau-bun-zi chegun*," he said, and John knew that they must prepare the ground for the ceremony of discovering the camp of the Sioux.

Galloping ahead now, they reached the bluff, chose a cleared spot and set to work to dig up the grass and break the earth into powder, making a space the shape of a rectangle. As soon as the earth was soft, they took their short axes and cut-down saplings, and encircled the rectangle

with a pole barricade. They had just finished it when the chiefs arrived.

While the others made camp and started the cooking, Chief Eagle entered the barricaded patch of earth. He walked gravely to the end opposite the Sioux country and seated himself. After singing and praying to the Great Manitou, he placed two smoothly polished stones on the mound of powdered earth. Again praying and singing, he asked the Great Manitou to tell him where to direct his men against the enemy.

When his voice grew silent, the camp-crier went in to him. A few minutes later he returned. "Come and smoke," he called to the principal warriors.

The older warriors followed him and seated themselves facing Chief Eagle. The young warriors stood behind them. Then Chief Eagle picked up his pipe. The crier came from the camp fire with a red-hot coal on a thick piece of bark and put it in the pipe-bowl. The chief smoked for a moment, then raised the stem of the pipe to the sky, slowly turning it to the north, south, east, and west, then took another puff. After a moment he handed it to the warrior nearest him, who took a puff and handed it on. Silently Chief Eagle waited until the last warrior had taken a puff from the Council pipe, then pointed to the two round stones on the mound of soft earth.

They had rolled to the lower edge, leaving a path behind them.

"Our enemy is fleeing from us," he said. "They go first towards the noon sun, then turn towards the couching sun."

The warriors nodded and waited.

"Tomorrow we will follow them," said Chief Eagle. "But tonight we must eat and rest."

Immediately the Council broke up. The braves, after hanging offerings of clothes, grain, tobacco, and the toys of their children on the pickets as sacrifices to the Great Manitou, went to eat their evening meal. In the morning they would gather up the toys to throw them on the battlefield.

John and three of the other young warriors were told to guard the horses while the others rolled themselves in their robes and went to sleep. After the first hour John could hardly stay awake. He sat with his back against a tree and looked at the stars. He heard the distant howling of wolves and the sound of wings, and the hooting of owls. He heard a twig snap and thought that he saw a shadow among the hobbled horses. Perhaps it was a Sioux sneaking in to steal them. John's scalp began to prickle. He got to his feet, his gun ready, and crept closer to the horses. He saw the shadow again and raised his gun.

"Don't shoot," said a voice, and John recognized a guard.

"What are you doing among the horses?" he asked.

"I thought I heard noises," said the guard.

"So did I."

They scouted around the horses but there was no sign of the enemy, only a rabbit leaping through the underbrush. John grinned. "There's our Sioux," he said, and went back to his tree. Leaning against it, he began to think of Morning Sky and how he would return with Sioux horses and scalps so that she would marry him. Thinking about her, he forgot that he had ever wanted to return to Ohio.

Four hours before dawn he was relieved by another scout, and he rolled up in his robe for a nap before the next day's march.

Three days later they were still marching southward after the retreating Sioux. John ached in every joint. It seemed as if the warriors were doing their best to make things difficult for him. It was the custom towards the warrior on his first warpath and John felt that they were taking advantage of him, not only because it was his first march, but because he was a white man. He had to keep telling himself that Morning Sky was worth any discomfort.

But there were so many things to remember. No one else must touch his wooden food dish. And when he did get a chance to sleep, he must keep his face towards his native country. While marching, he must remember not to sit on the bare earth, but on branches or grass. He must never get his feet soiled. If he had to cross a river, he must take off his clothes and carry them high out of the water so that they would not get wet. And never must he march on a beaten path, but make his own no matter how difficult.

The next day at noon, they discovered that they were out of water and the warriors on foot could hardly walk. John and several of the young men were sent ahead to look for water. But it was almost sunset before they found a stream. They sent a smoke signal to the rest of the party, then satisfied their own thirst. By the time the others had reached the water some of them were so ill that they were delirious. For two days they rested beside the stream.

A small band of Ojibway, led by Tabashaw, joined them there, and John saw Cut Nose with them. His painted face and strong body made him look very fierce.

"Pale Face makes poor warrior," Cut Nose said, standing with his feet wide apart. "No Indian maiden will wed him."

John felt his hand tighten on his gun. "The

future will prove if Cut Nose speaks truly," he said quietly.

"You will never return alive," said Cut Nose scornfully.

John shrugged, refusing to be drawn into an argument. He guessed that Morning Sky had refused to marry Cut Nose until after the warriors returned from their raid. Then he remembered how funny Cut Nose had looked when cornered by the moose.

"Don't lose your powder horn," he teased, "or the Sioux might get you."

Cut Nose gave him a look of such hatred that John shivered. He suddenly realized that he would have to be on guard not only against the Sioux but against his rival as well. If Cut Nose had his way, he would never return to claim Morning Sky.

Tabashaw marched with them for two days, then Chief Eagle held another Council to determine the whereabouts of the enemy. When he had finished talking to the Great Spirit, he called the warriors to smoke.

"A large band of Sioux are marching towards us," he said. "We must march at night and take them by surprise."

Tabashaw rose, his large shoulders filling a red coat, his topknot spangled with brass. He was known as a troublemaker, but Chief Eagle had accepted his offer of help.

"You tell us each day that the Sioux are near," said Tabashaw. "Yet we do not meet them. The Sioux are wise. They wait for us to tire. Then they will turn and attack us." He looked over the heads of the other chiefs. "I do not wish to go further with you. I will return another time to fight the Sioux."

Chief Eagle rose to his full height of six feet.

"You, Tabashaw, and many of your warriors live nearer the Sioux than we do. You think little of waiting to meet them another time. But we are far from home. It is not easy to march against the Sioux. So we must go on." He waved a hand at his warriors. "We carry the toys of our children. We must avenge them and leave their toys on the battlefield. You are not a coward. You will go with us."

Tabashaw's eyes flashed. "No man calls me a coward," he said. "I will go on for three days. Then if we do not meet the Sioux, I will return with my men."

"That is good," said Chief Eagle. "While praying, I saw the eyes of the Sioux. I promise you that we will meet them."

Now they marched at night, and in the morning John was sent to keep guard on a small rise of land. The sun beat down on his shoulders. Even with the light on his back, it made his eyes burn to look out over the sun-dried prairie. By noon it was agony. He could only squint at the

landscape, shutting his eyes to ease them, and fight off sleep.

Hungry and weary, he finally dozed, and wakened with a sharp pain in his side. Cut Nose was prodding him with his spear, a mocking smile on his lips.

"Pale Face sleeps on watch," he said, sneering. "We could all be killed."

John glanced quickly at the sun. "I just shut my eyes for a minute," he said.

"I do not believe you," said Cut Nose. "Neither will Chief Eagle."

John watched Cut Nose run down the hill and was worried. This was the chance the Indian had been waiting for. He pressed a hot hand to his head as he saw Cut Nose and another Indian returning. Would Chief Eagle send him back, and Cut Nose claim Morning Sky as his wife?

"Chief Eagle sends for you," said Cut Nose. "You will be punished."

John repressed an angry answer and strode away, leaving two young Indians to watch for signs of the Sioux. He found the old chief seated on the ground holding his son's toy. He looked up at him but did not speak. John waited, the muscles in his legs cramping.

"Is it true, as Cut Nose says, that you slept on duty, Black Falcon?" he finally asked.

"I closed my eyes for only a minute, brave Chief Eagle," said John.

"But you would have slept if Cut Nose had not wakened you," said the chief, after a moment of reflection.

"I do not think so," said John. "But I'm not sure."

"You are honest, Black Falcon," said the chief. "But I will have to punish you."

John clenched his fist. Warriors had been flogged for neglecting their duty. He would go back to Morning Sky with scars of disgrace, not honor. He wanted to remind Chief Eagle that he had ridden all night without sleep, and that the sun beating on his head had made him feel ill. But warriors did not make excuses. He spoke, but he did not beg for mercy.

"Chief Eagle is a just leader," he said. "I will take his punishment."

The chief grunted. "Your horse will be taken from you. You shall continue the march on foot."

John waited.

Chief Eagle studied him. "That is all," he said. "Go eat, then sleep, for tonight we continue the march."

John walked numbly to the camp fire and ate his meal without speaking to anyone; then he found a cool spot and lay down to sleep. When he wakened it was almost dark and the camp was preparing for the march. Carrying his spear, shield, and gun, John fell in line with the horse-

less warriors. Anger gave speed to his step when he saw Cut Nose, mounted on his horse, raise a leather thong and bring it down sharply. Wawpoo reared, then started to run. Cut Nose threw John a mocking glance.

Two nights later they had not met the Sioux, and among the young warriors who had no relatives killed in the massacre, there was discontented whispering. Why should they go on a fruitless hunt for the Sioux when they could be buffalo hunting? That night the sentinels were unable to keep some of them from deserting.

"If we are going to return without scalps," they said, "we might as well return now."

Several of them were missing in the morning, as well as some of the horses. Ill will grew among those robbed. They demanded that Chief Eagle help them get their horses back.

"I will get you Sioux horses," said the chief.

"Tomorrow or we turn back," said Tabashaw, speaking for his warriors.

John caught Cut Nose's eyes on him. He knew that his rival did not want to turn back, not without a scalp at his belt. He saw Cut Nose's glance move to his topknot. He had a sudden vision of him taking his scalp, passing it off for a Sioux's. He put his hand to his head, but he could not repress a shiver as he saw Cut Nose grin.

Toward noon the next day, Chief Eagle sent

John and Cut Nose on horseback to scout the surrounding district. Cut Nose still rode Wawpoos and John's horse was a skinny pony.

"Watch for fires and bring back word if you see any signs of the enemy," said Chief Eagle.

John wondered at the chief picking out Cut Nose for his companion as he knew there was ill blood between them. But the chief had his own reasons. He knew that, not being friends, John and Cut Nose would ride separately, and so spy out a larger territory.

A half mile away from camp, a hollow in the prairie hid them from sight. John turned slightly to the right and Cut Nose rode straight ahead. John began to wonder what he would do if at the top of the ridge, he saw the Sioux advancing. He dug his heels into his horse, forcing him into a gallop.

Hardly had he done so when he felt a bullet whistle past him. He whirled about and saw Cut Nose reloading his gun. John raised his gun, but at the same instant caught sight of horsemen with bows, riding over the crest behind Cut Nose.

"Sioux!" he shouted.

Cut Nose hesitated, then swung his horse about to face the Sioux. But before he could bring his gun up to fire, an arrow struck him in the chest, throwing him from his horse.

John fired at the Sioux, saw one of them fall



"Sioux!" John shouted.

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off his horse, then whirled his own horse about and dashed towards the camp. Behind him, the Sioux drew rein beside Cut Nose, fighting over who was going to have his scalp and horse.

John lashed his horse and galloped into camp, shouting that Sioux were coming.

Tabashaw was for mounting and charging to meet them, but Chief Eagle advised waiting in the bushes to meet the enemy. "We have the protection of the trees here," he said.

After hiding the horses among the trees, they waited. The Sioux rode over the hill, the leader carrying Cut Nose's scalp on his spear, and riding John's horse. Round and round the bluff they rode, taunting the enemy, daring them to come out. Some of the reckless warriors answered the taunt, only to be shot down by arrows before they could reload their muskets. Finally the Sioux drew off for a consultation. Then they rode to a bush a quarter mile away.

"They are going to wait for darkness," said Chief Eagle.

"They will kill us all in a hand-to-hand fight," said Tabashaw.

"It is true that they outnumber us," said Chief Eagle. "But we will not run away, not until we avenge our dead children."

Tabashaw turned away in a huff. He did not want to lose his life. He was seeking no revenge,

not even for Cut Nose, who was not a near relative, but a hotheaded young man who wanted to take scalps to prove himself a warrior.

Chief Eagle called a Council to discuss ways of outwitting the Sioux. Anxiously John watched their faces. The plans did not seem to satisfy them. Suddenly John had an idea. He asked to speak to Chief Eagle, who, after deliberating, sent for him.

"You have a plan?"

"Yes, brave Chief Eagle," said John. "As soon as the Sioux attack us, I will take some of the young men and steal their horses. With their horses and ours, we can defeat them."

"Have you forgotten, Black Falcon, that the Sioux can hole up in a bluff like we are doing?" asked the chief.

"I can prevent that," said John.

"How?"

John told him and the chief smiled. "You are a brave warrior, Black Falcon. When this battle is over you will have many horses as your share of the spoils."

"I want the return of my own horse," said John.

"You will have him."

Waiting no longer, John hurried away to choose twelve young men to follow him. They made their way through the bluff, and while the

clouds blanketed the stars so that they could only see a few feet in front of them, they made their plans.

Then at the first war whoop of the Sioux moving towards them, John led six of the young men towards the Sioux's tethered horses.

"We'll never be able to find them in the dark," objected a young warrior.

"We'll find them," said John, and gave a two-note whistle. It was answered by a soft neighing. "That's my horse," said John. "He would come to me if he were loose."

They advanced quickly now, the noise of the battle behind them as the Sioux tried to draw their enemy into the open. They made their way into the Sioux bluff and found the horses unguarded. John was not surprised. The Sioux had been so sure of a victory. Swiftly they untied the horses and rode back to the rear of their own bluff.

Shouts, gunfire, and screams came from the other side of the bluff. John gave the signal that was to bring Chief Eagle and most of his men to their side in a false flight from the Sioux, leaving a small rear guard.

Leaping and dodging, they came through the bushes and mounted the horses. Then, led by John, they galloped around the bluff and came at the Sioux from the rear, throwing their spears

and shooting. Surprised, the Sioux tried to retreat into the bush.

But the second part of John's plan was at work. The dry grass and tinder-box undergrowth was ablaze, wrapping trees in flames, and sending the Sioux out into the open. In half an hour the battle was over, and only a few Sioux warriors were alive to flee into the night.

Chief Eagle gave orders to gather up their own wounded and dead. Then leaving their children's toys, and souvenirs of their friends on the battlefield, they rode off into the night. At dawn they buried their dead, tended their wounded, and feasted.

Chief Eagle made a speech. He told the warriors that it was John's plan that had saved them from defeat. John had become a hero.

Satisfied with their revenge, the warriors rode back to Pembina, and there was great rejoicing when they arrived. They feasted and danced, and recounted brave deeds, displayed Sioux scalps, and praised John.

Morning Sky was at the dance, her eyes bright and her cheeks glowing. John watched for an opportunity to speak to her. But it wasn't until after midnight that he found her alone, leaning against a tree. He started towards her, and she turned and ran through the bushes. Flitting before him like a nighthawk, he had all he could do to catch her.

She looked up at him with startled eyes when he caught her beside a group of poplars and held her in his arms so that the moonlight shone on her face.

"I am a warrior now, Morning Sky," he said.

"I know," she answered.

"Then you will marry me?" He sat down on the ground and, taking her hand, pulled her down beside him.

"You are a warrior," she said. "But you are still a white man. You will leave me."

John longed to kiss her. She was beautiful and good. But her words made him stop to think. He knew he would never want to leave her, but if he took her to Ohio, how would his people treat his Indian wife? The thought of what they might say held him silent for a minute.

Then he looked at her. He felt the charm of her sweetness and beauty, and his doubts fled. Cut Nose had died because of her. He himself had become a warrior for her sake, and he was not going to give her up now.

"I love you, Morning Sky," he said softly.

With a little cry, Morning Sky put her cool fingers on his face, and leaned against him, murmuring soft Cree love words.

"Tomorrow I will come to your lodge," she said.

John jumped to his feet and pulled her to his

side. "I'll be waiting," he said. "Now we will go back to the celebrations."

Hand in hand, they returned to the camp.

Epilogue

After John's marriage to Morning Sky, he continued to live the life of an Indian, hunting and joining in raids against the Sioux. In 1812 when the Lord Selkirk settlers came to build their homes near Fort Douglas, a Hudson's Bay Post, he saw white women and children. The sight of them made him lonesome for his own people and he tried to persuade Morning Sky to return to Ohio with him. But Morning Sky refused. She had three children and was afraid to take them into a strange world.

John had to give up his plans again but he refused to join the Nor'Westers when they tried to drive the white settlers from the country. He went to the Lake of the Woods with Netnokwa. It was there that Miles Macdonnell and Captain D'Orsonnes found him and persuaded him to lead Lord Selkirk's soldiers to the Red River to make the country safe for settlers.

John agreed, and in the middle of winter guided the soldiers on a four-hundred-mile

march to the Red River. They took Fort Daer, near Pembina, from the Nor'Westers, then marched on Fort Douglas, which was also in the hands of the Nor'Westers.

They climbed the walls, surprised the sentinels, disarmed them, and then rushed the fort. Once again the fort belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company.

John stayed until Lord Selkirk arrived in the spring to make a treaty with the Indians. Lord Selkirk tried to get John to go back to England with him to tell the people about his life with the Indians. But for the second time John refused a trip to England, saying that he wished to find his own relatives.

"Then I will give you letters to help you on your way," said Lord Selkirk, who had already agreed to give him twenty dollars a year for the rest of his life for helping the soldiers. "But I am afraid that I cannot help you take your children with you. The Indians are at peace with us, but the least little thing might make them distrust us and cause a massacre."

So John had to leave without his children. He put his canoe in the Red River, glanced at the Hudson's Bay flag fluttering over Fort Douglas, then dipped his paddle in the river, swollen with the water from the prairie where he had spent so many years of his life, and began his journey home.

After many months of searching, John found his brothers and sisters still alive, but his parents were dead. He visited them for a year, told his story, which was later published, then returned to Morning Sky and his children. He put his children in school.

One of his sons, James, became a minister. In 1851 when the first Presbyterian minister, John Black, came to the Red River Settlement, he met James at Pembina. They both preached at the same service, and in the afternoon James preached to the Indians in the Chippewa* language, using a Chippewa testament and hymns that had been translated by his father.

James had a brother who was a chief of a tribe and lived and hunted with the Indians. And James's son, John Tanner, took a farm in 1870 where Minnedosa now stands. Here the young Tanner operated a ferry to cross the Minnedosa River, the one his grandfather knew so well. It was called Tanner's Crossing—later to be renamed Minnedosa.

If John Tanner—Black Falcon—could return like the ghosts of the warriors on the Minnedosa River, he would be surprised at the change in his hunting grounds. Clear Lake is now a summer resort and a game preserve; the city of Brandon took its name from Brandon Fort built in 1798 by the Hudson's Bay traders; Portage la

* Cree.

Prairie is on the site of old Fort la Reine, built by the French in 1738; Winnipeg covers the sites of Fort Rouge of 1738, and Fort Douglas of 1812; where the Pembina Fort (in the neighborhood of fur posts built from 1738, 1795, to Alexander Henry's post of 1801) stood, runs a highway between Winnipeg and Minneapolis . . . Highways have replaced trails he traveled; towns have sprung up on his camping sites; and the wild animals have retreated further into the wilderness, though many of them are still hunted on the prairie.

It is believed that John died as he had lived; still a hunter and trapper. But no one seems to know where he was buried. Perhaps beside some beautiful lake, or in an island of trees on his beloved prairie. But wherever his grave may be, we remember him for being able to adapt himself to the life of the Indians, for protecting the first white settlers, for translating the Bible and hymns into an Indian language, and for being the father of a missionary who lived to help his mother's people adapt themselves to a new civilization, based on Christianity.



The End

Source Material

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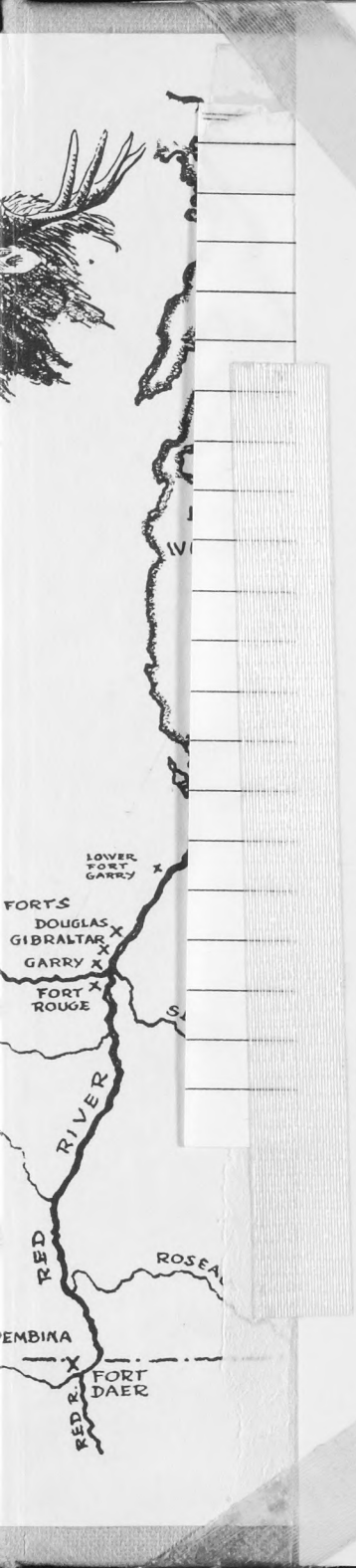


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OLIVE KNOX was and
from six to twelve years of age lived in the United States,
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and several books. She is the author of *The Young
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